

KIRKMAN • OTTLEY • CRABTREE

INVINCIBLE™



VOLUME SEVEN

THREE'S COMPANY

Introduction by Eric Stephenson



image® COMICS PRESENTS

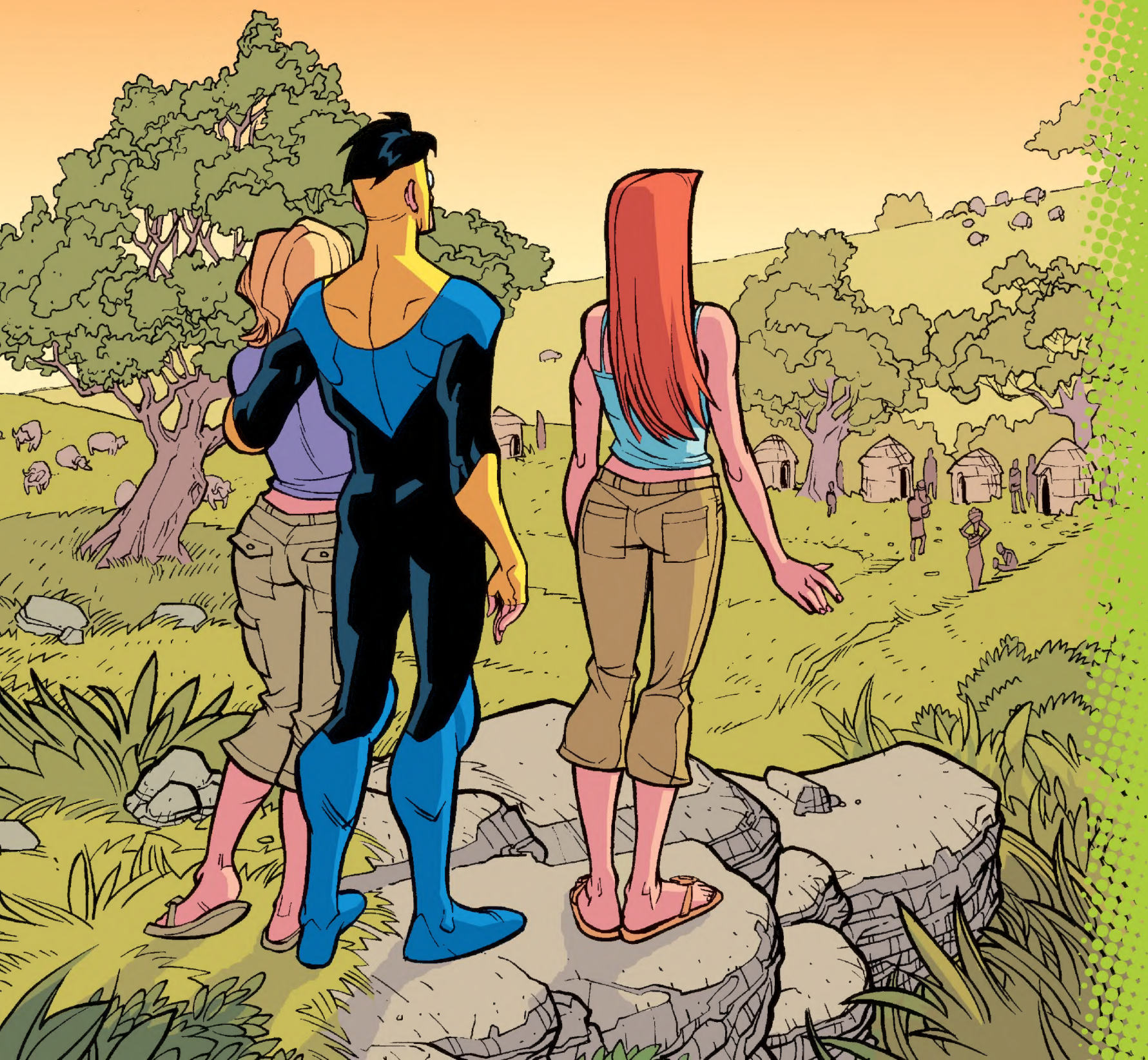
INVINCIBLE™

THREE'S COMPANY



CREATED BY
**ROBERT KIRKMAN
& CORY WALKER**

image®



writer
**ROBERT
KIRKMAN**

penciler, inker
**RYAN
OTTLEY**

inker
(chapter 1)
**CLIFF
RATHBURN**

colorist
**BILL
CRABTREE**

letterer
**RUS
WOOTON**

cover
**RYAN OTTLEY
& BILL CRABTREE**

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INTRODUCTION

When I was editing comics for Extreme Studios back in the '90s, one of the best parts of my job was reading Alan Moore's SUPREME stories before anyone else. Alan faxed his pages to us back then, and even the worst day could easily be improved by the delivery of a freshly faxed SUPREME script to my desk. And when Alan started writing JUDGMENT DAY and YOUNGBLOOD, too? Man, I felt like I was one of the luckiest guys in comics!

These days I'm even luckier -- at least in terms of the sheer volume of cool stuff that makes its way through the Image office on the way to the printer. Image is publishing some of the best comics in the company's history, and I'm not going to lie: Seeing these books before they hit the stands really is one of the perks of the job here.

Not surprisingly, two of the books I look forward to the most each month are written by the tirelessly prolific Robert Kirkman. One is Robert's zombie-movie-that-never-ends, THE WALKING DEAD. The other, even less surprisingly, is the book you're holding in your hands now, a book collecting the latest batch of stories from what in my not-always-that-humble opinion probably is the best superhero comic in the universe.

(Just a bit of trivia regarding that tagline, by the way: Most people probably assume it's a nod to Stan Lee's famous cover copy for THE FANTASTIC FOUR, but it was actually inspired by Paul Weller's post-Jam outfit The Style Council, who were frequently billed as "probably the best pop band in the world" back in the '80s. And they nicked it from a British beer advert... Somewhat hyperbolic, more than a little irreverent and perfect for a book like INVINCIBLE.)

In other words, I'm an unabashed fan of this book and of Robert's writing in general. INVINCIBLE, THE WALKING DEAD, the short-lived TECH JACKET, BRIT, BATTLE POPE... I get a kick out of everything Robert writes for us. Heck, I even like some of his Marvel work, and I'm not just saying that because this is the introduction to one of his books. I mean, I'll freely admit not every idea the guy comes up with is a winner. He originally wanted to call INVINCIBLE "Bulletproof," after all, and have you ever seen the original color scheme for Mark's snazzy super-suit? Not pretty. Oh, and before INVINCIBLE or THE WALKING DEAD were even pitched to Image, he tried to convince us that the book we just had to publish was SCIENCE DOG. So, it's not like I'm just sitting here looking for ways to butter Robert up when it's not deserved. I really do think he's good.

Really good.

People always ask me, though, "What's Robert Kirkman's secret?"

I suppose that makes a certain amount of sense. A lot of people look at a comic book like INVINCIBLE, a creator-owned title that has succeeded where so many others have not, and they figure there must be something going on, especially when they consider that Robert is also the writer of another creator-owned title of some repute, THE WALKING DEAD. They assume there's some kind of trick to it, or less charitably, that Robert's just damn lucky. I was there at the beginning, though, and lucky is the last thing Robert Kirkman was, especially where INVINCIBLE was concerned.

As you may or may not know, INVINCIBLE was launched as part of a larger superhero line including Keith Giffen & Ross Richie's DOMINION, Phil Hester & Andy Kuhn's FIREBREATHER, Jay Faerber & Jamal Igle's VENTURE and the format-busting CLOCKMAKER by Jim Krueger & Matt Smith. Despite some interesting concepts and strong material, the line wasn't particularly

well received. Worse, **DOMINION** disappeared after its second issue and **CLOCKMAKER** faded away after shortly thereafter. **FIREBREATHER** and **VENTURE** were both miniseries and apart from a **FIREBREATHER** one-shot and some **Venture** appearances in **NOBLE CAUSES**, neither stuck around too long. **INVINCIBLE** was the ill-fated superhero line's sole success.

Just as buzz was beginning to build around the book, though – issues were selling out, the first trade paperback was being rushed out – Cory Walker, **INVINCIBLE**'s co-creator and original artist, decided he couldn't continue drawing the book. And just as the first trade hit stores, **INVINCIBLE** disappeared from the racks. Issue five came out and then... nothing. By the time issue six finally showed up, interest had dwindled considerably. Retailers were bemoaning the fact that late shipping had killed interest in the book and nearly everyone I knew was ready to call time.

Little did they know, that the book was just hitting its stride.

Robert had found another artist, the indomitable Ryan Ottley, and slowly but surely, the book started coming out regularly again. Under any other circumstances, that probably wouldn't have saved the book. Numbers continued to drop and even though Robert had just launched **THE WALKING DEAD** to instant acclaim, it really seemed like **INVINCIBLE** had next to no chance of attracting comic buyers' attention a second time 'round.

Surprisingly, though, it did. Numbers started to go up, slowly at first, and the buzz about this quirky new superhero book started to build again. Why? Well, if there's a secret to Robert's success, and to the success of **INVINCIBLE**, I actually revealed that a little earlier: He's really good.

Not only is Robert a damn good writer, but he understands how to draw readers in and make them care about his characters. He gets that you can have all the over-the-top superhero action, wall-shattering fight scenes and clever dialogue in the world, but unless people are actually invested in the characters, it's all for naught. He knows that even the most ingenious plot twists mean next to nothing if we're not actually interested in what happens next. And, best of all, he makes it seem effortless.

Writing comics is far from light work, however, and writing comics as good as **INVINCIBLE**, even less so. All the best writers in this business make it seem easy. How they manage to pull that off may be the real secret.

However Robert does it, he manages to keep readers like myself completely enthralled by the adventures of Mark Grayson and his ever-expanding cast of family, friends and foes, month-in and month-out. Don't take my word for it, though – read on and see for yourself.

As for me, Robert just sent over the latest issue, so I'm off to read that...

Eric Stephenson
San Francisco 2006

*Eric Stephenson is the Executive Director of Image Comics. He's written a few comics himself and is currently spending way too long getting his new series **THE NOWHERE MEN** ready for release.*

CHAPTER ONE





I SEE
YOU TWO
ARE GETTING
ALONG.

LET ME JUST RECAP A LITTLE HERE, SON. YOU GO OUT INTO SPACE ON A BIG ADVENTURE-- SEE YOUR FATHER, WHICH I REALLY DON'T WANT TO GET INTO, BRING BACK YOUR STEP BROTHER, ASK ME TO RAISE HIM-- AND THEN YOU SKIP OUT FOR THE REST OF THE DAY?



YEAH, I GUESS SO. SORRY ABOUT THAT. TALKING TO AMBER TOOK A LITTLE MORE TIME THAN I EXPECTED.

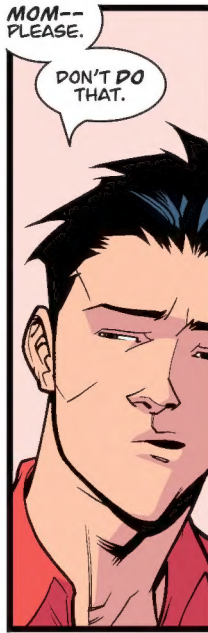


TALKING?

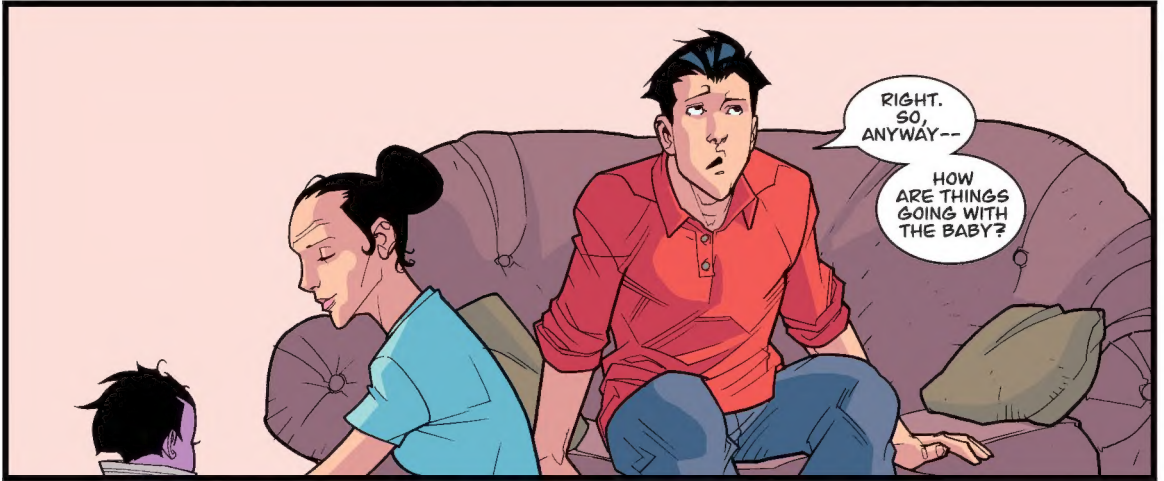


MOM-- PLEASE.

DON'T DO THAT.



WELL, IF YOU EXPECT ME TO THINK YOU'VE BEEN **JUST TALKING** FOR THREE HOURS, YOU'RE FOOLING YOURSELF.



RIGHT. SO, ANYWAY--

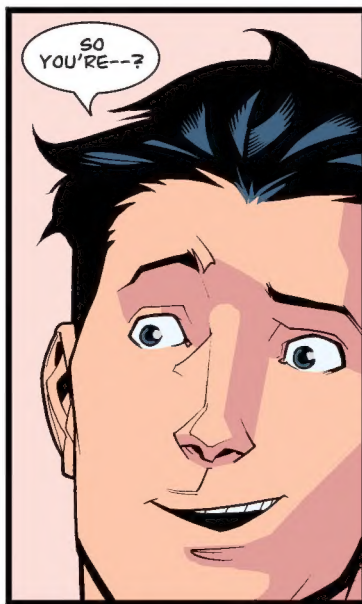
HOW ARE THINGS GOING WITH THE BABY?

YOU'RE A CRAFTY ONE, MARK GRAYSON.

YOU LEAVE ME HERE WITH A BABY THAT HAS NO ONE TO RAISE IT FOR THREE HOURS AND YOU THINK I'M GOING TO BE ABLE TO PART WITH IT?



SO YOU'RE--?



LIKE YOU DIDN'T PLAN THIS.

HOW COULD I SAY NO? OF COURSE I'M GOING TO TAKE CARE OF HIM.



SPEAKING OF HIM. DOES HE HAVE A NAME?



ACTUALLY, NO. THE MANTIS PEOPLE AGED SO FAST THEY CHOSE THEIR OWN NAME ONCE THEY WERE OLD ENOUGH. I THINK THAT WAS ABOUT A WEEK INTO THEIR LIFE, THOUGH, SO HE SHOULD ALREADY HAVE PICKED ONE.



I DON'T THINK WE'LL BE HONORING THAT TRADITION. CECIL SAID I'D NEED TO FIND OUT HIS NAME SOON, ANYWAY.



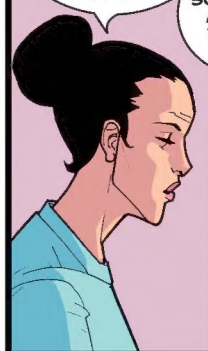
YOU TALKED TO CECIL?



YEAH, HE 'PORTED OVER WHILE YOU WERE WITH YOUR GIRLFRIEND.



HE TOLD ME ALL ABOUT THE ADOPTION OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND SOMETHING ABOUT HOLOGRAPHIC SOMETHING OR OTHERS TO MASK HIS SKIN TONE.



IT ALL MADE A WHOLE LOT OF SENSE--AND I'D HAD A COUPLE HOURS TO GET ATTACHED TO THE LITTLE BUGGER.

OH, AND SOMETHING ABOUT A PRIVATE TUTOR.



YEAH--I GOT TO SPEND TIME WITH HIM ON THE PLANET A LITTLE BIT, BUT I WAS WITH HIM IN THE SHIP FOR SIX DAYS ON THE WAY HERE.



I'M GLAD HE COULD--

I NEED YOU, KID.

BROTHER!

WE'VE GOTTEN TO BE BUDDIES, HAVEN'T WE?



--SPEAK OF THE DEVIL. LOOKS LIKE I'VE GOT TO RUN. I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW?



YES, PLEASE--AND I ALMOST FORGOT TO MENTION: ART BROUGHT A NEW COSTUME BY FOR YOU. IT'S UPSTAIRS.

BE CAREFUL.

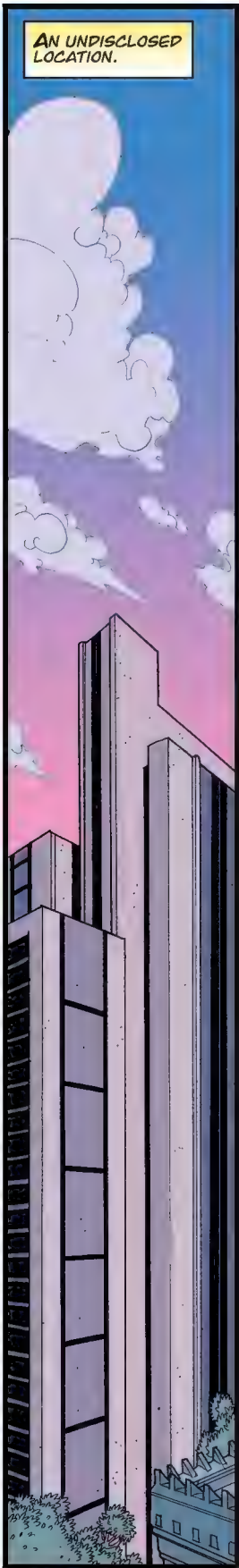


WILL DO.

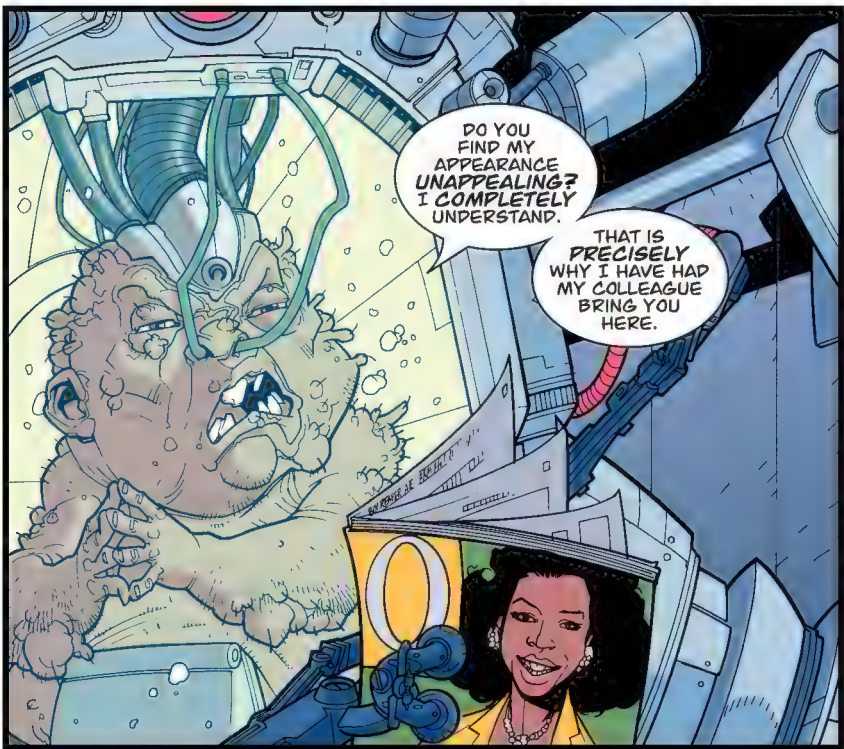
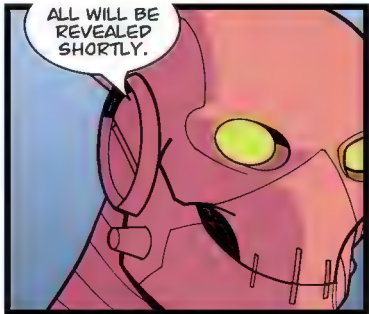
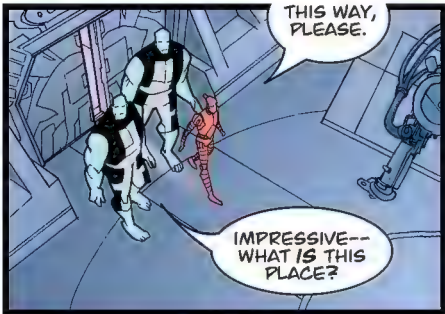
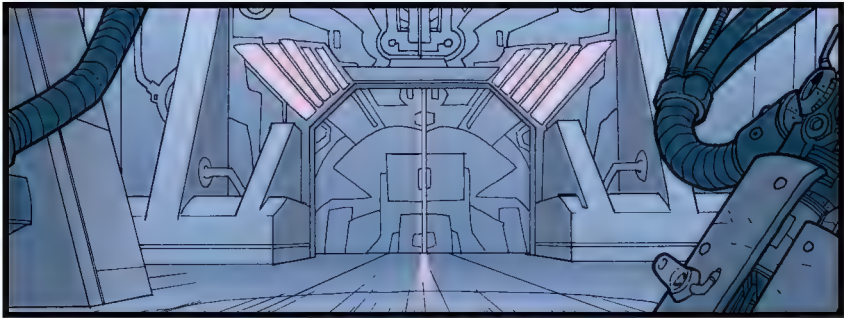


YOU ARE A CUTE ONE, AREN'T YOU?





AN UNDISCLOSED
LOCATION.

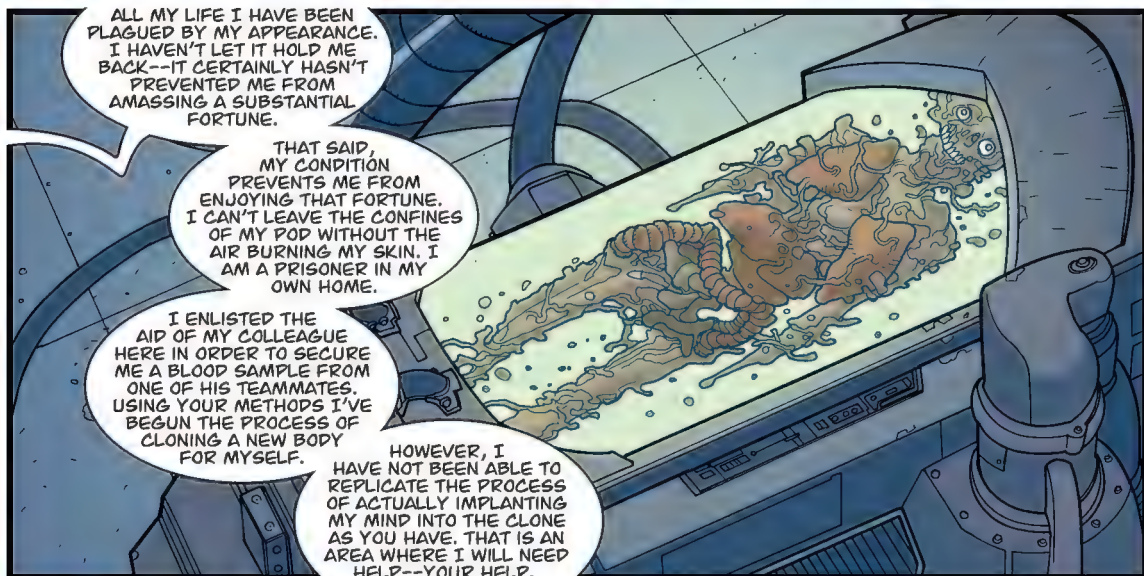




IF YOU'LL TURN YOUR ATTENTION TO THE APPARATUS TO MY RIGHT I'LL EXPLAIN TO YOU EXACTLY WHAT I'D LIKE YOU TO DO.

IS THAT ONE OF OUR GESTATION TUBES?

A SLIGHTLY IMPROVED VERSION, YES.



ALL MY LIFE I HAVE BEEN PLAGUED BY MY APPEARANCE. I HAVEN'T LET IT HOLD ME BACK--IT CERTAINLY HASN'T PREVENTED ME FROM AMASSING A SUBSTANTIAL FORTUNE.

THAT SAID, MY CONDITION PREVENTS ME FROM ENJOYING THAT FORTUNE. I CAN'T LEAVE THE CONFINES OF MY POD WITHOUT THE AIR BURNING MY SKIN. I AM A PRISONER IN MY OWN HOME.

I ENLISTED THE AID OF MY COLLEAGUE HERE IN ORDER TO SECURE ME A BLOOD SAMPLE FROM ONE OF HIS TEAMMATES. USING YOUR METHODS I'VE BEGUN THE PROCESS OF CLONING A NEW BODY FOR MYSELF.

HOWEVER, I HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO REPLICATE THE PROCESS OF ACTUALLY IMPLANTING MY MIND INTO THE CLONE AS YOU HAVE. THAT IS AN AREA WHERE I WILL NEED HELP--YOUR HELP.



I'M WILLING TO ALLOW YOU TO NAME YOUR PRICE IN ORDER TO PROCURE THAT HELP.

INTERESTED?



NAME OUR PRICE?

I THINK WE COULD PROBABLY DO THAT.

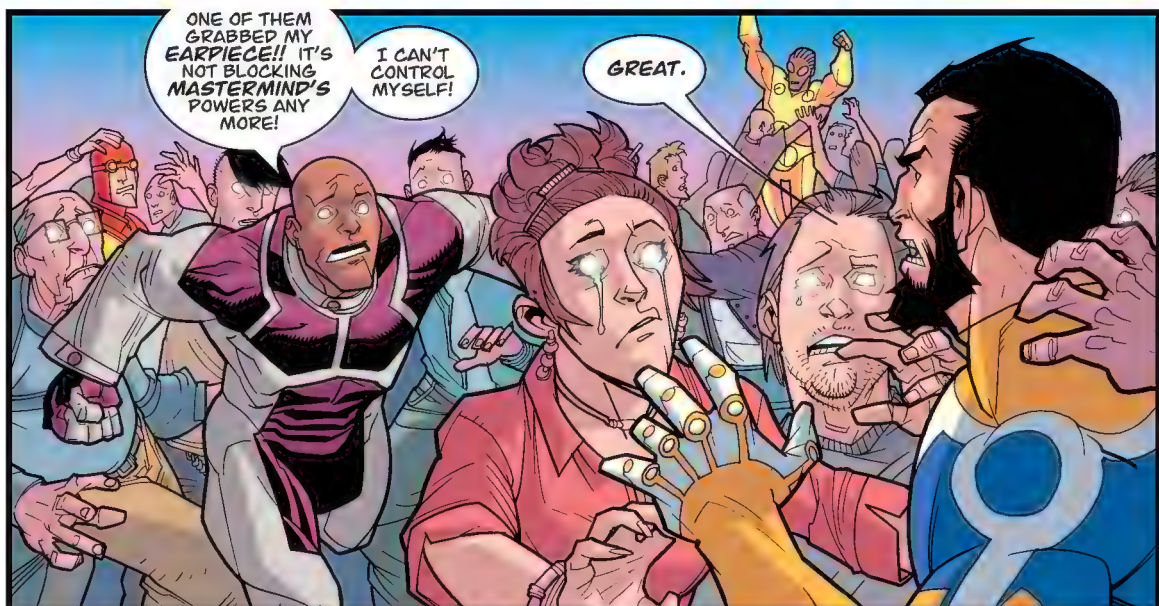
YEAH.



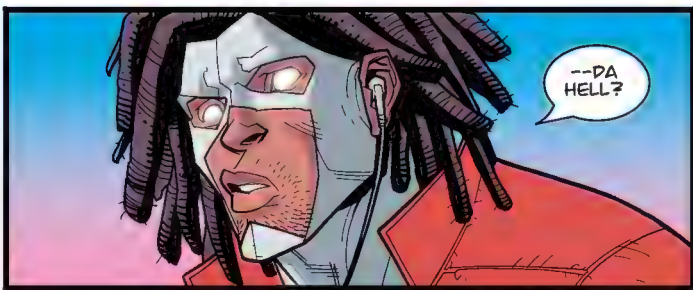
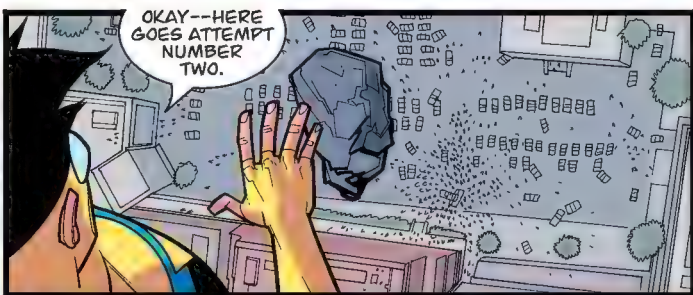
YOU
KIDDIN',
RIGHT?!

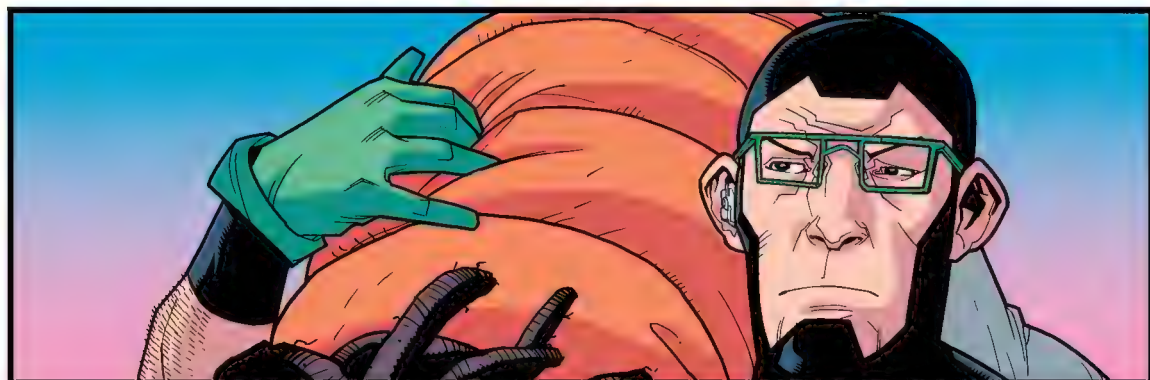
THIS
CAN'T BE
ALL YOU
GOT!!

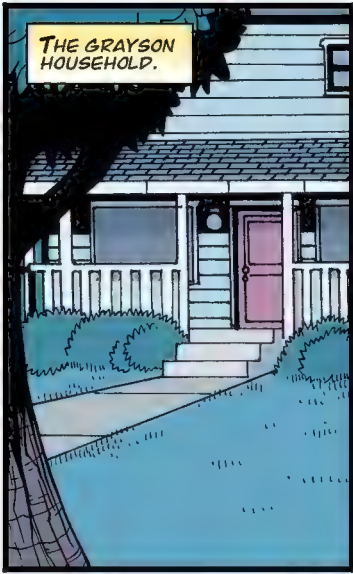
915 QTO
CLIFF



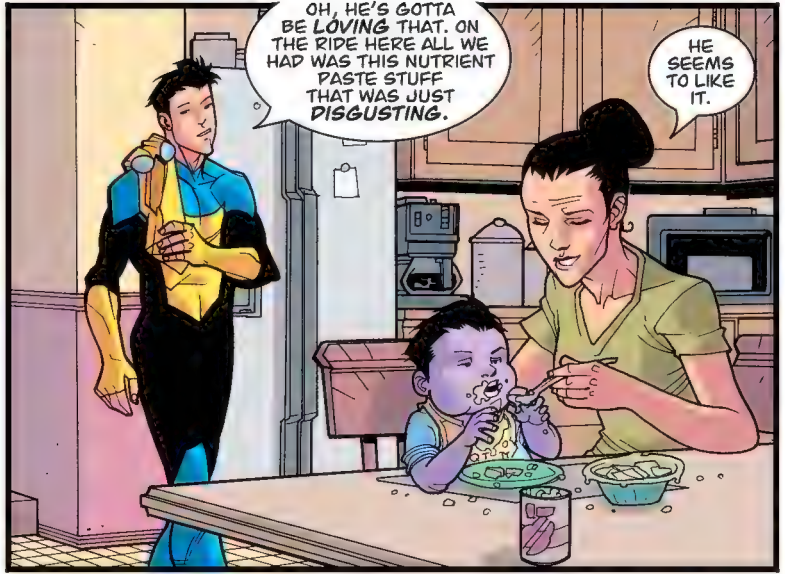








THE GRAYSON HOUSEHOLD.



OH, HE'S GOTTA BE LOVING THAT. ON THE RIDE HERE ALL WE HAD WAS THIS NUTRIENT PASTE STUFF THAT WAS JUST DISGUSTING.

HE SEEMS TO LIKE IT.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING BACK HERE? YOU NEED LAUNDRY OR SOMETHING?



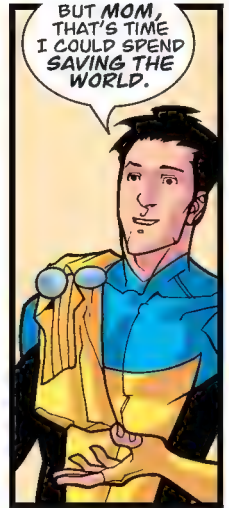
I JUST WANTED TO CHECK AND MAKE SURE EVERYTHING WAS OKAY WITH THE BABY AND ALL BEFORE I HEAD BACK TO MY DORM.



AND I NEED LAUNDRY. I DON'T KNOW IF I HAVE ANY CLEAN CLOTHES AT THE DORM.



YOU KNOW--IT'D BE A LOT EASIER IF YOU ACTUALLY BROUGHT YOUR CLOTHES BACK FOR ME TO WASH ON A REGULAR BASIS. OR, Y'KNOW--YOU COULD JUST WASH THE CLOTHES YOURSELF.



BUT MOM, THAT'S TIME I COULD SPEND SAVING THE WORLD.



RIGHT. YOU'RE ALWAYS SAVING THE WORLD. I FORGOT.

FEED YOUR BROTHER WHILE I GO GET YOUR CLOTHES.



WHAT'S SHE GOT FOR YOU HERE?

PEARS?

NICE.

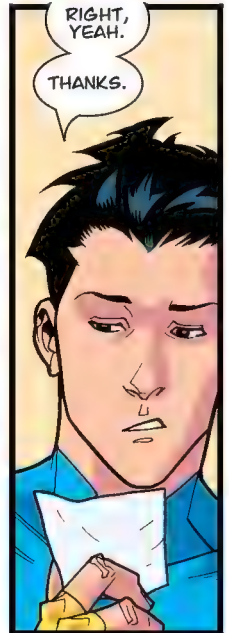


YOUR FRIEND EVE CALLED EARLIER. SHE LEFT A NUMBER FOR YOU TO CALL HER BACK.

OH, I ALMOST FORGOT.



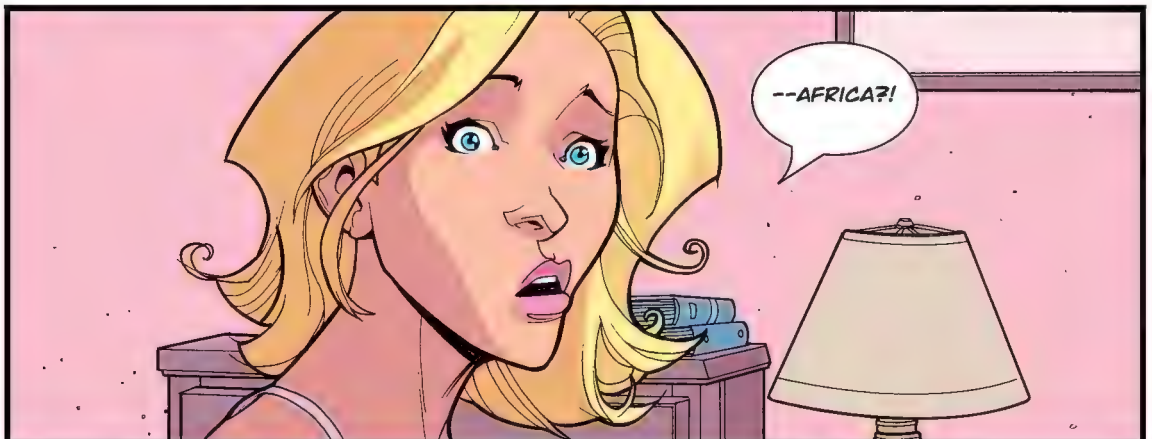
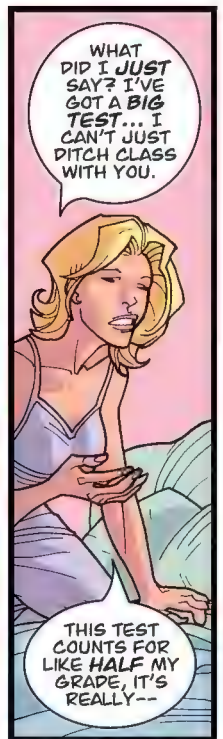
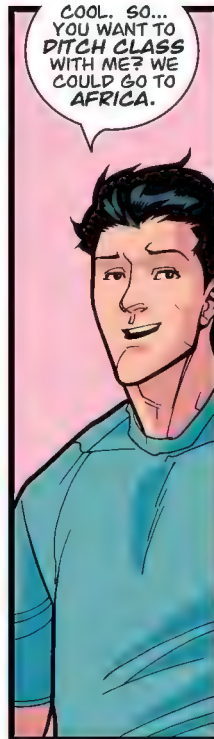
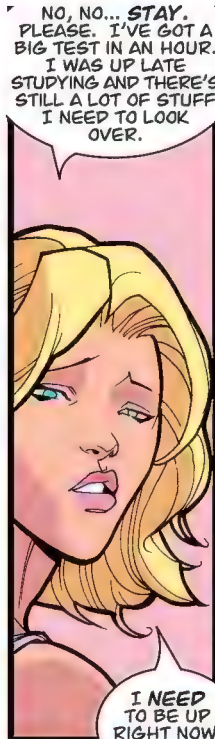
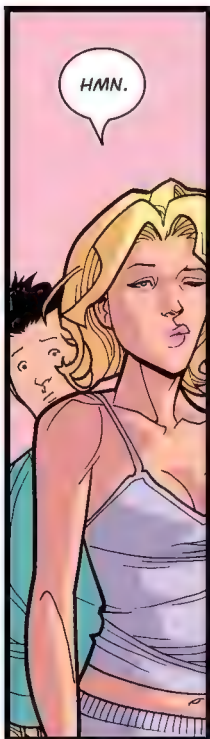
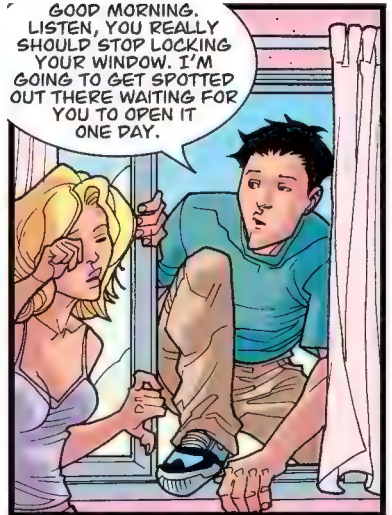
IT'S GOT SOME KIND OF COUNTRY COPE IN FRONT OF IT AND ALL KINDS OF EXTRA NUMBERS. SEE IF CECIL CAN KNOCK THE COST OFF YOUR BILL. ANYTHING MORE THAN FIVE MINUTES WILL COST A FORTUNE.

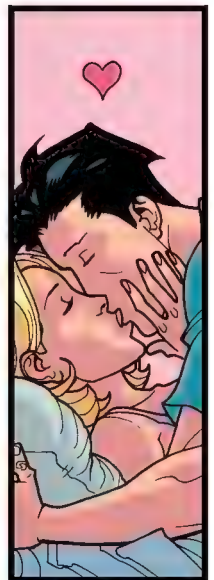
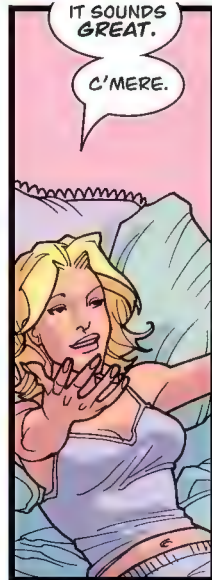
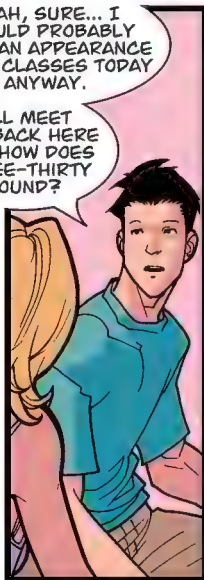
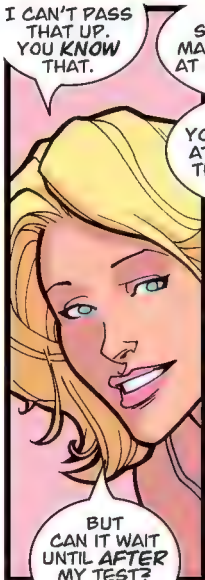
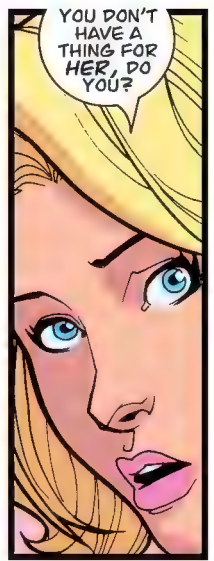
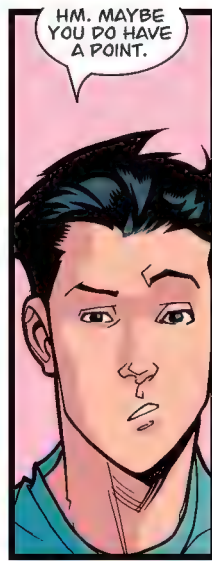
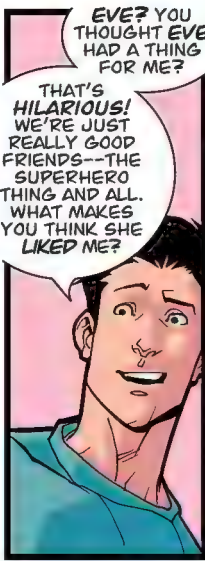
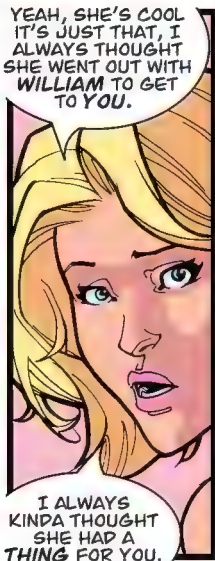
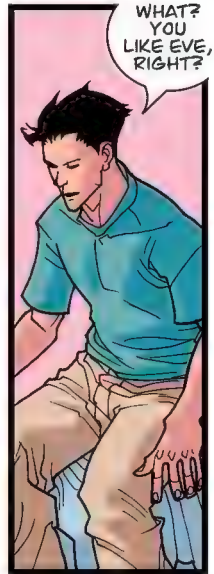
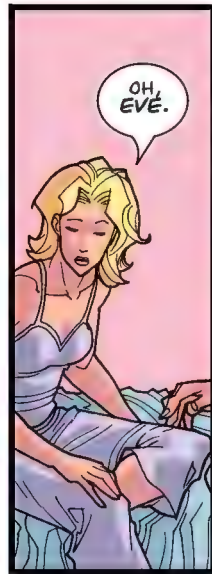
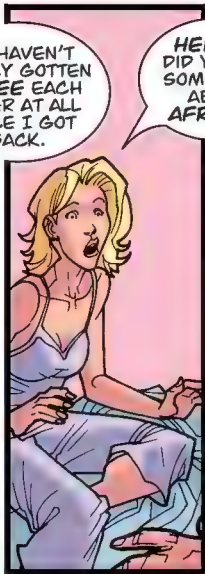


RIGHT, YEAH.

THANKS.

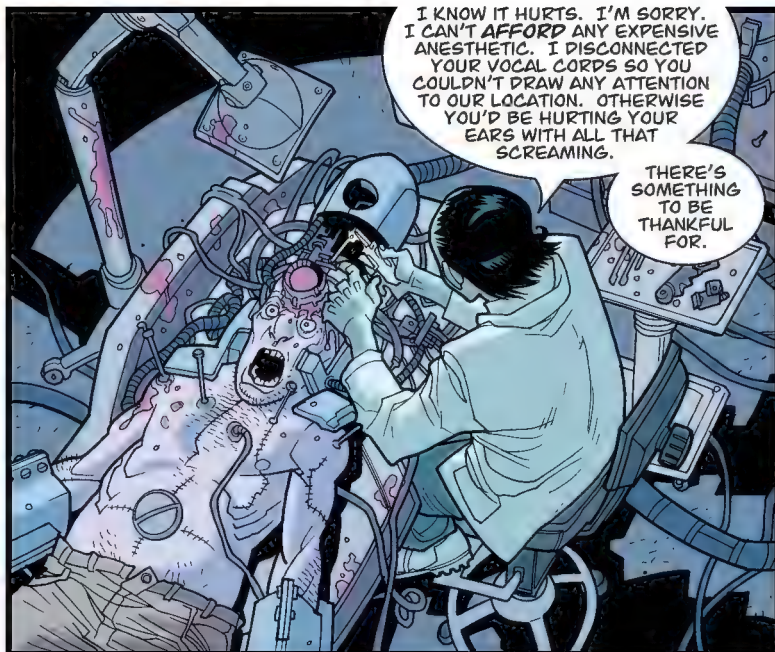






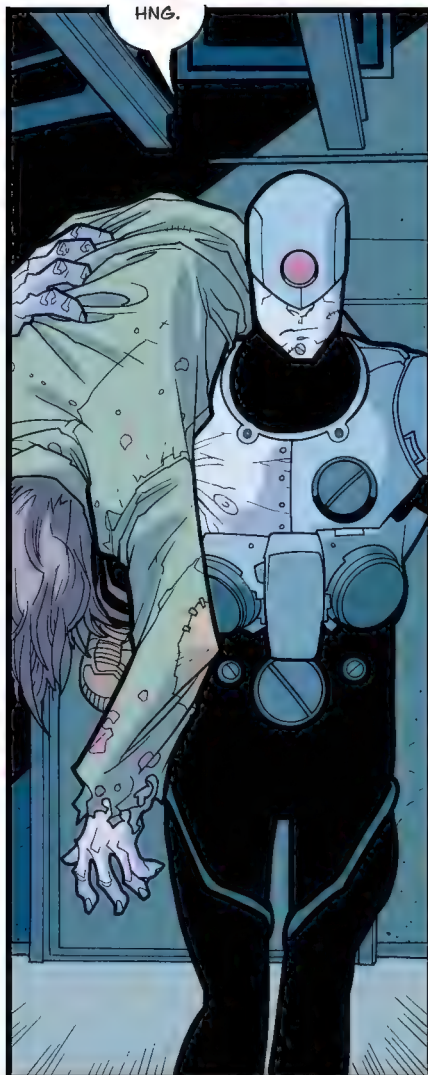


BACK AT UPSTATE UNIVERSITY--THE SECRET CLOCK TOWER HIDEOUT OF D.A. SINCLAIR, CREATOR OF THE REANIMEN.



I KNOW IT HURTS. I'M SORRY. I CAN'T AFFORD ANY EXPENSIVE ANESTHETIC. I DISCONNECTED YOUR VOCAL CORDS SO YOU COULDN'T DRAW ANY ATTENTION TO OUR LOCATION. OTHERWISE YOU'D BE HURTING YOUR EARS WITH ALL THAT SCREAMING.

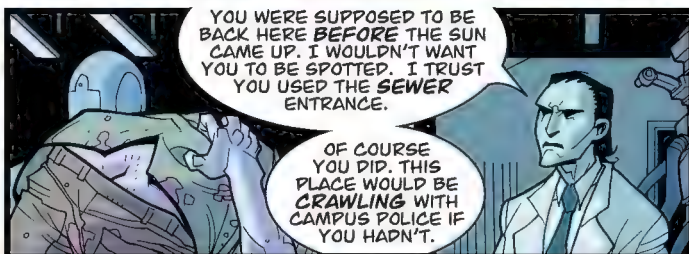
THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE THANKFUL FOR.



HNG.

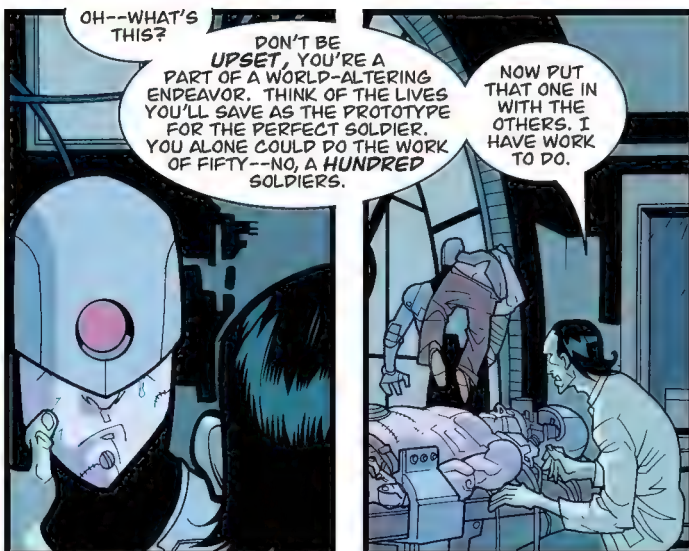
AH, RICK SHERIDAN--MY FIRST WORKING REANIMAN--THE ONE WHO STARTED IT ALL. MY PRIDE AND JOY.

YOU'RE LATE.



YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE BACK HERE BEFORE THE SUN CAME UP. I WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO BE SPOTTED. I TRUST YOU USED THE SEWER ENTRANCE.

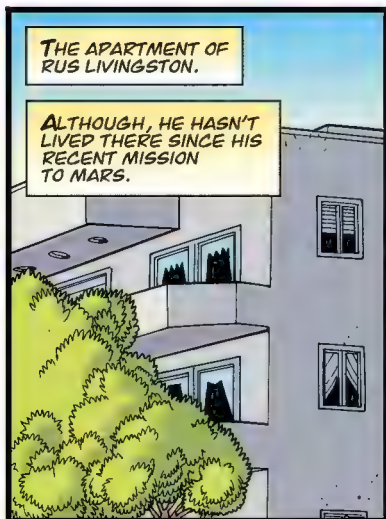
OF COURSE YOU DID. THIS PLACE WOULD BE CRAWLING WITH CAMPUS POLICE IF YOU HADN'T.



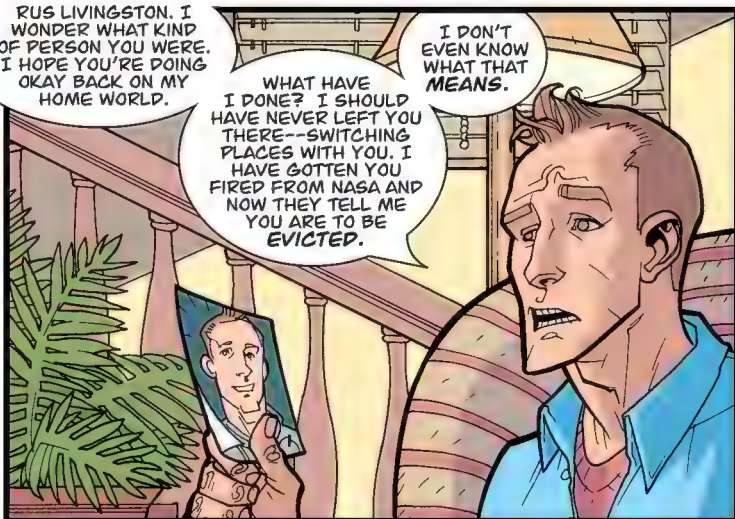
OH--WHAT'S THIS?

DON'T BE UPSET, YOU'RE A PART OF A WORLD-ALTERING ENDEAVOR. THINK OF THE LIVES YOU'LL SAVE AS THE PROTOTYPE FOR THE PERFECT SOLDIER. YOU ALONE COULD DO THE WORK OF FIFTY--NO, A HUNDRED SOLDIERS.

NOW PUT THAT ONE IN WITH THE OTHERS. I HAVE WORK TO DO.



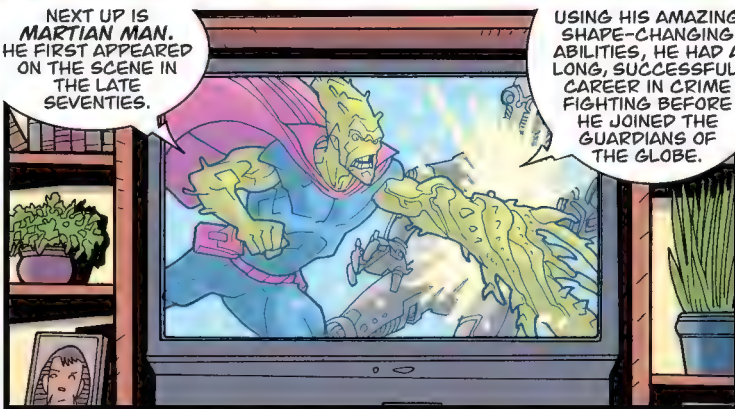
RUS LIVINGSTON. I
WONDER WHAT KIND
OF PERSON YOU WERE.
I HOPE YOU'RE DOING
OKAY BACK ON MY
HOME WORLD.



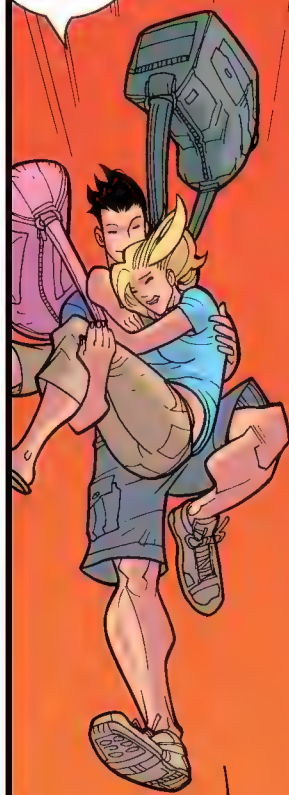
I HATED MY HOME WORLD--
MARS. MYSELF AND THE
OTHER REBELS HATED THE
ENSLAVEMENT OF THE
SEQUIPS. THEY TALKED
ME INTO THIS... COMING
HERE. I JUST DON'T
KNOW IF IT WAS THE
BEST IDEA.



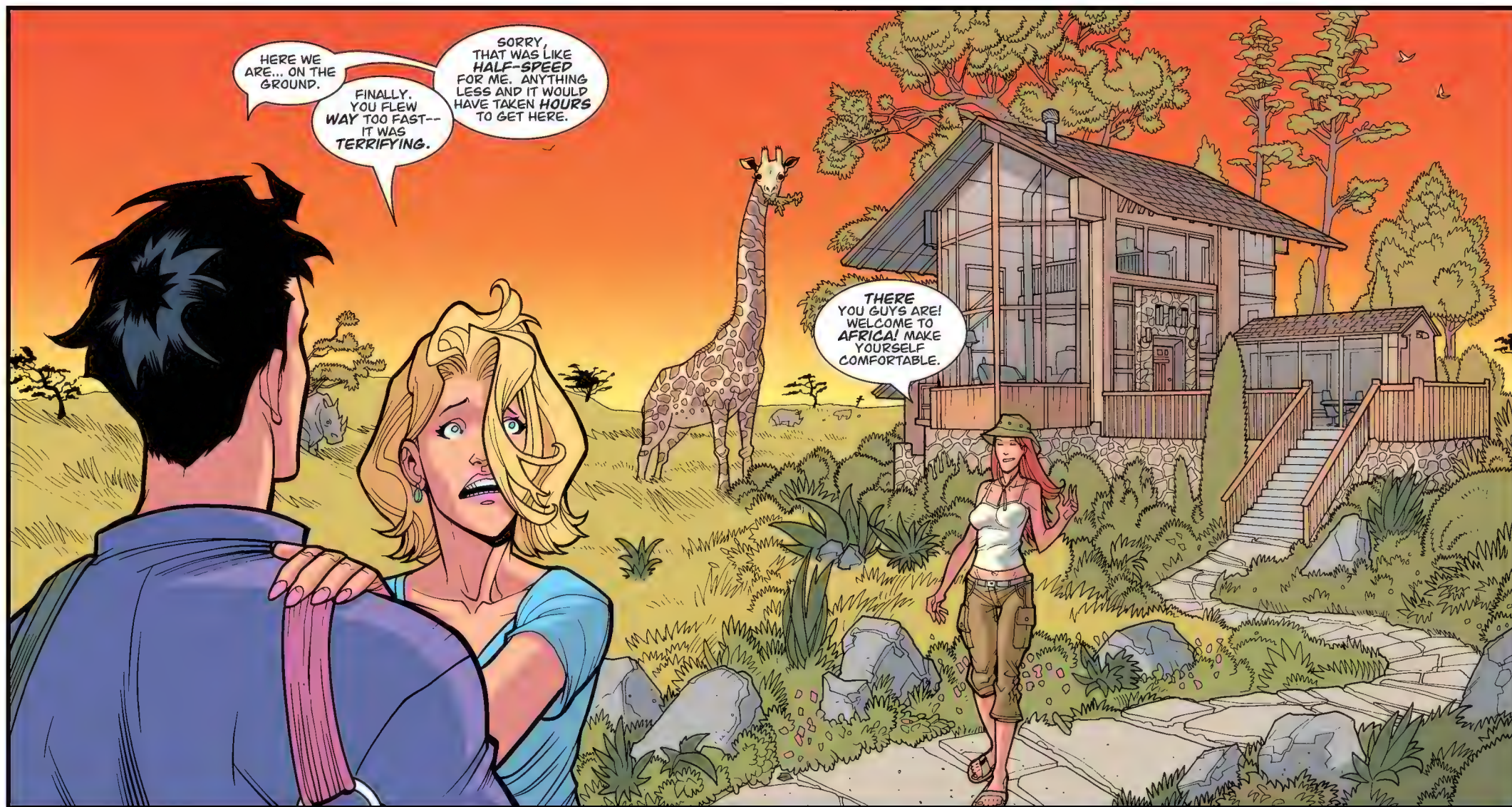
NEXT UP IS
MARTIAN MAN.
HE FIRST APPEARED
ON THE SCENE IN
THE LATE
SEVENTIES.



YOU CAN
OPEN YOUR
EYES, NOW.
WE'RE
LANDING.



JUST--
JUST TELL
ME WHEN
WE'RE ON THE
GROUND.



HERE WE
ARE... ON THE
GROUND.

FINALLY.
YOU FLEW
WAY TOO FAST--
IT WAS
TERRIFYING.

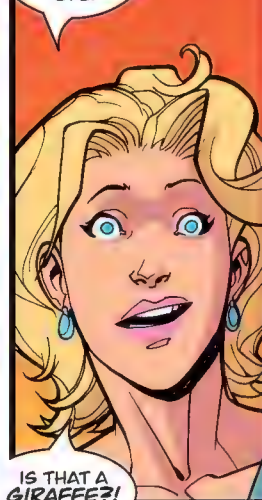
SORRY,
THAT WAS LIKE
HALF-SPEED
FOR ME. ANYTHING
LESS AND IT WOULD
HAVE TAKEN HOURS
TO GET HERE.

THERE
YOU GUYS ARE!
WELCOME TO
AFRICA! MAKE
YOURSELF
COMFORTABLE.

THIS IS TOTALLY
COOL, EVE. THANKS
FOR INVITING
US.

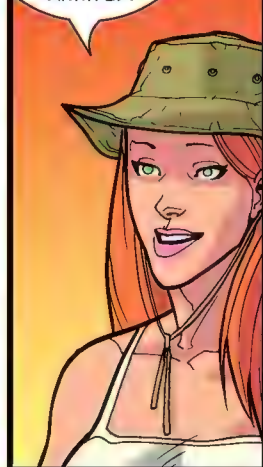


YEAH, THIS IS
GOING TO BE
AWESOME.
THANKS,
EVE.

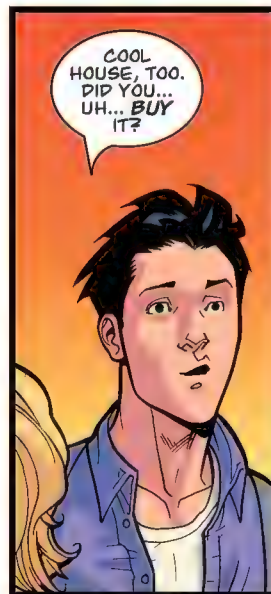


IS THAT A
GIRAFFE?!

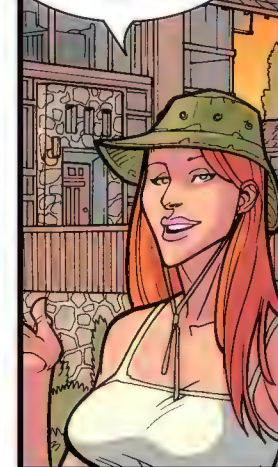
YEAH--I PAID
THEM TO STICK
NEAR THE HOUSE
SO I COULD
IMPRESS YOU
WHEN YOU
ARRIVED.



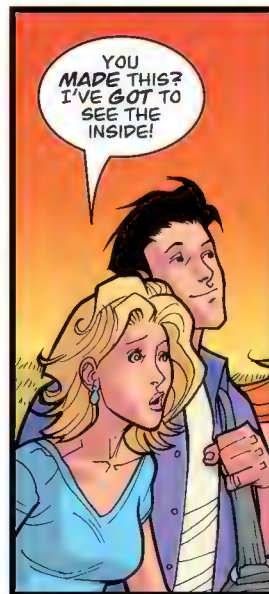
COOL
HOUSE, TOO.
DID YOU...
UH... BUY
IT?



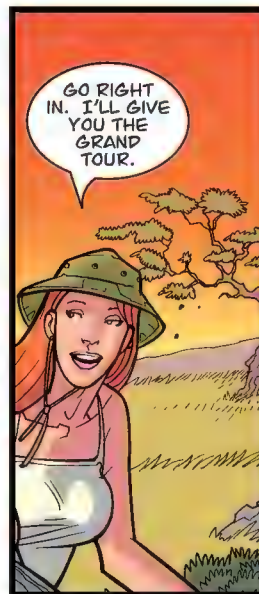
YOU KIDDING? I
COULDN'T AFFORD
THIS PLACE! I MADE IT.
I'VE BEEN PRACTICING.
I CAN DO ALL SORTS OF
THINGS WITH MY
POWERS NOW.

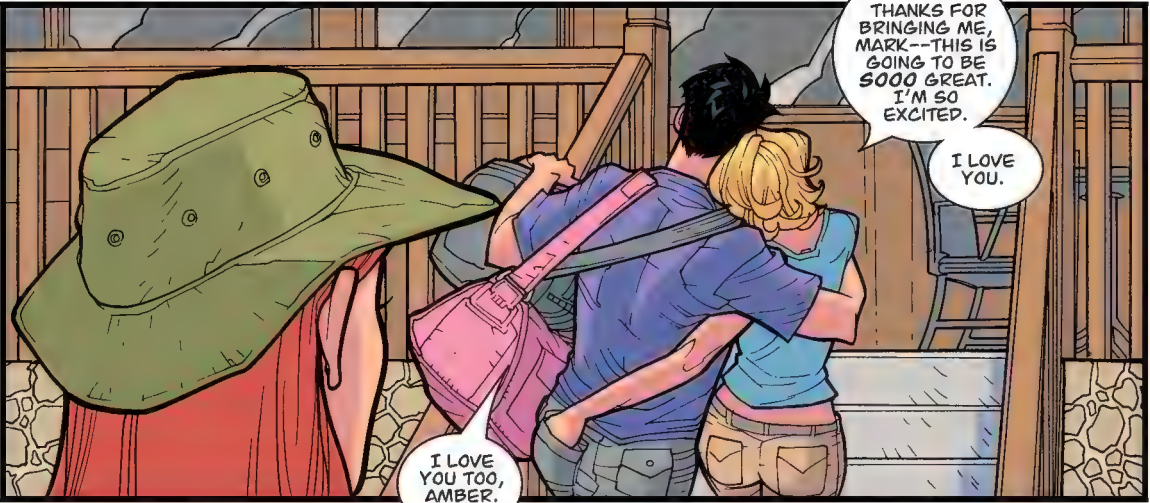


YOU
MADE THIS?
I'VE GOT TO
SEE THE
INSIDE!



GO RIGHT
IN. I'LL GIVE
YOU THE
GRAND
TOUR.



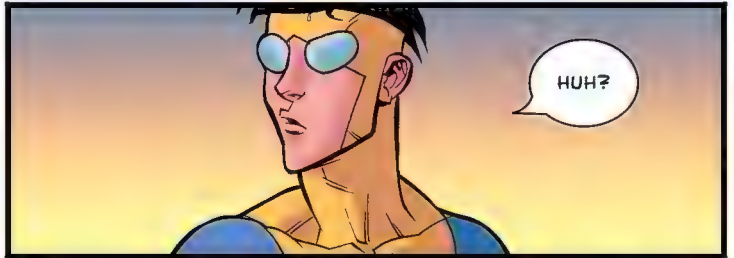
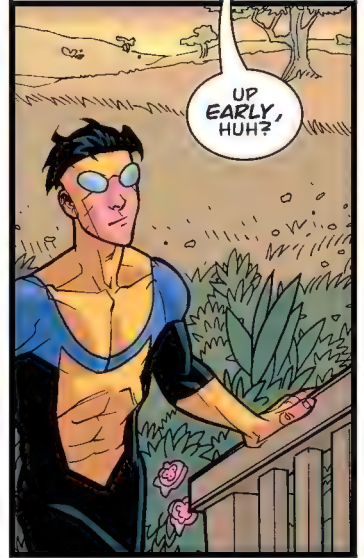
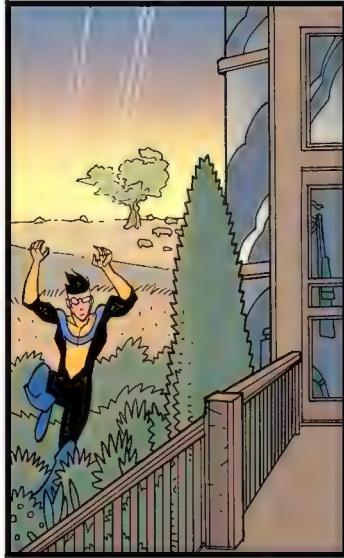


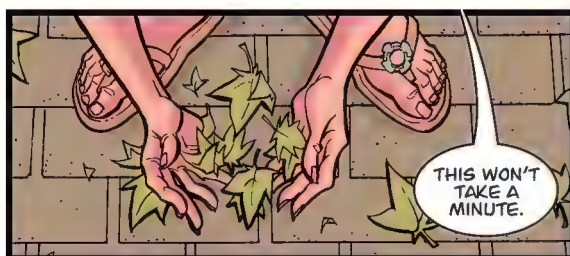
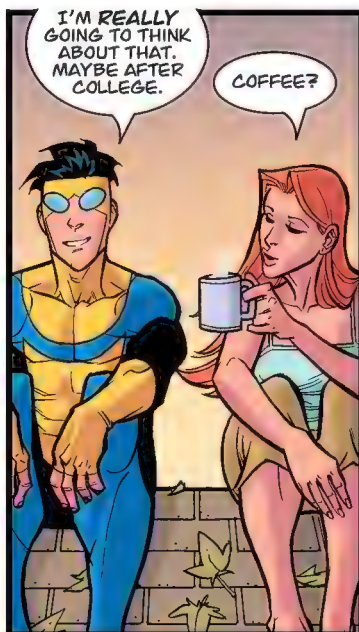
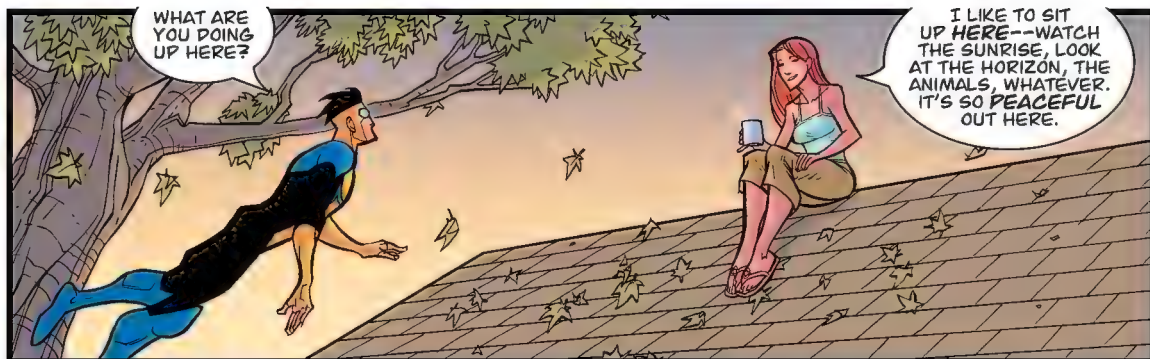


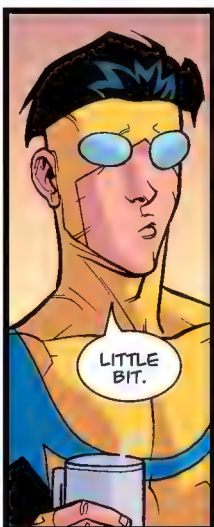
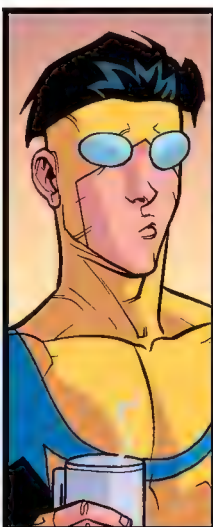
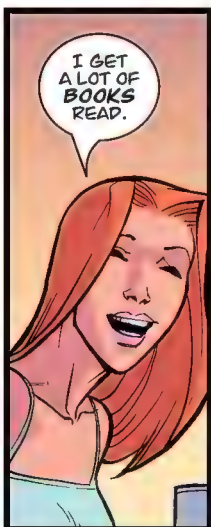
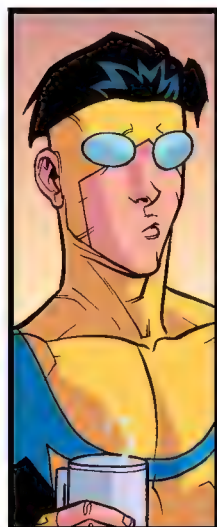
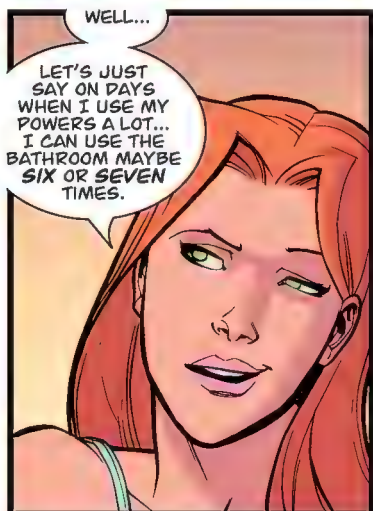
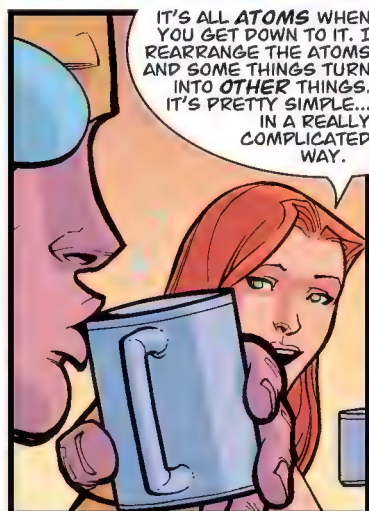
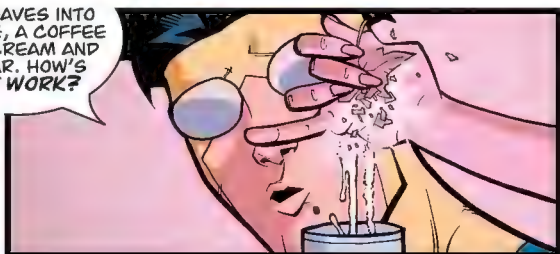
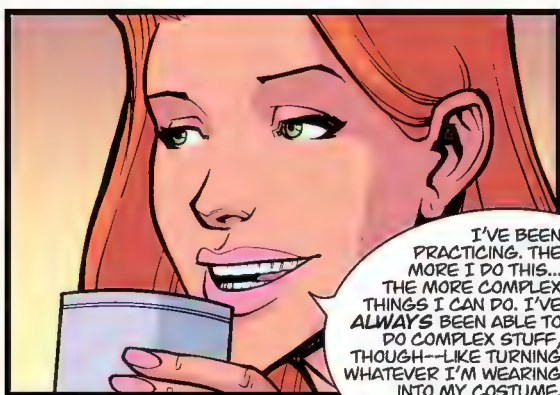
CHAPTER TWO

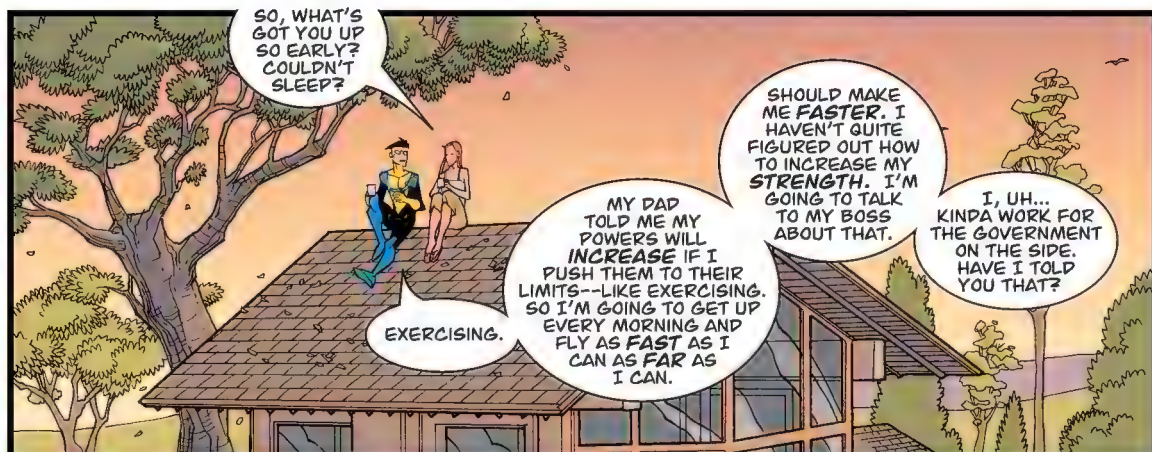












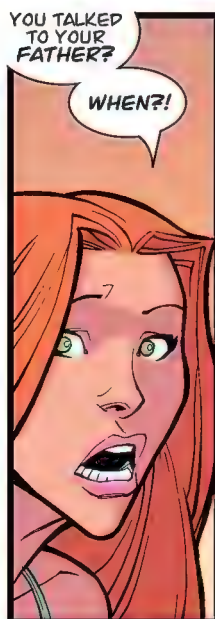
SO, WHAT'S GOT YOU UP SO EARLY? COULDN'T SLEEP?

EXERCISING.

MY DAD TOLD ME MY POWERS WILL INCREASE IF I PUSH THEM TO THEIR LIMITS--LIKE EXERCISING. SO I'M GOING TO GET UP EVERY MORNING AND FLY AS FAST AS I CAN AS FAR AS I CAN.

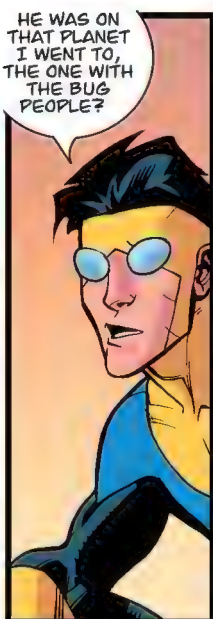
SHOULD MAKE ME FASTER. I HAVEN'T QUITE FIGURED OUT HOW TO INCREASE MY STRENGTH. I'M GOING TO TALK TO MY BOSS ABOUT THAT.

I, UH... KINDA WORK FOR THE GOVERNMENT ON THE SIDE. HAVE I TOLD YOU THAT?

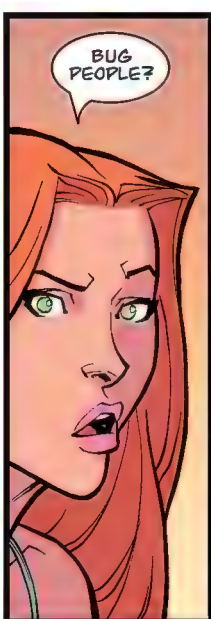


YOU TALKED TO YOUR FATHER?

WHEN?!



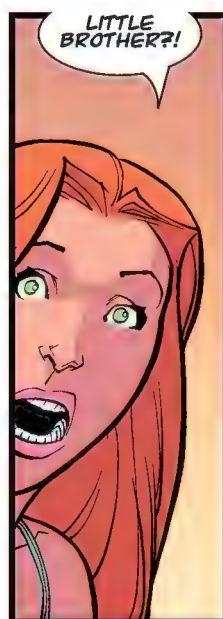
HE WAS ON THAT PLANET I WENT TO, THE ONE WITH THE BUG PEOPLE?



BUG PEOPLE?



YEAH, THE PLANET WHERE MY BROTHER'S MOTHER CAME FROM-- WHERE I GOT MY LITTLE BROTHER...



LITTLE BROTHER?!



SO, UH... LOOKS LIKE I'VE GOT A LITTLE EXPLAINING TO DO.



A LITTLE.



OKAY... WHERE DO I BEGIN? SCIENCE DOG CAME TO MY HOUSE...

ONE HOUR AND A LONG EXPLANATION LATER.

AND YOU JUST LET THEM TAKE HIM? I MEAN, YOU DIDN'T TRY TO STOP THEM?

I COULDN'T STAND UP... LET ALONE FIGHT ANYONE. IT WAS THE WORST FIGHT I'VE EVER BEEN IN, WORSE THAN THE ONE WITH MY DAD.

YOU BELIEVE HIM?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

YOU THINK HE REALLY CHANGED HIS WAYS? YOUR DAD, I MEAN. OR DO YOU THINK HE LIED TO YOU TO GET YOU TO HELP HIM?

I DON'T KNOW. I'M TRYING TO NOT THINK ABOUT IT. I'M TOO BUSY TRYING TO CONVINCE MYSELF THAT THE VILTRUMITES HAVEN'T EXECUTED HIM YET... AND THAT I'M GOING TO SOMEHOW BE ABLE TO SAVE HIM.

MARK?

CAN WE JUST CHANGE THE SUBJECT?

I'D REALLY LIKE TO JUST CHANGE THE SUBJECT.

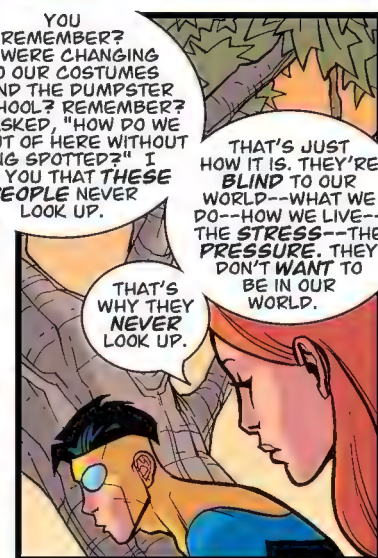
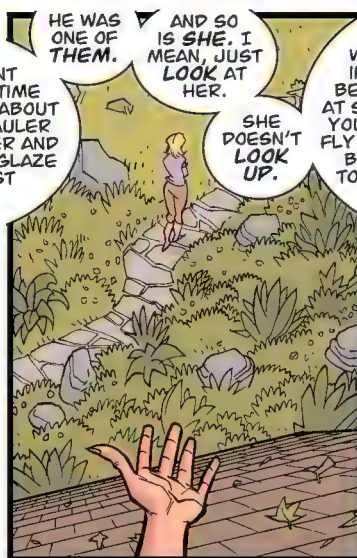
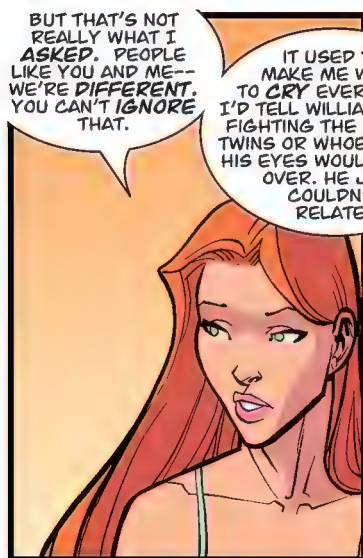
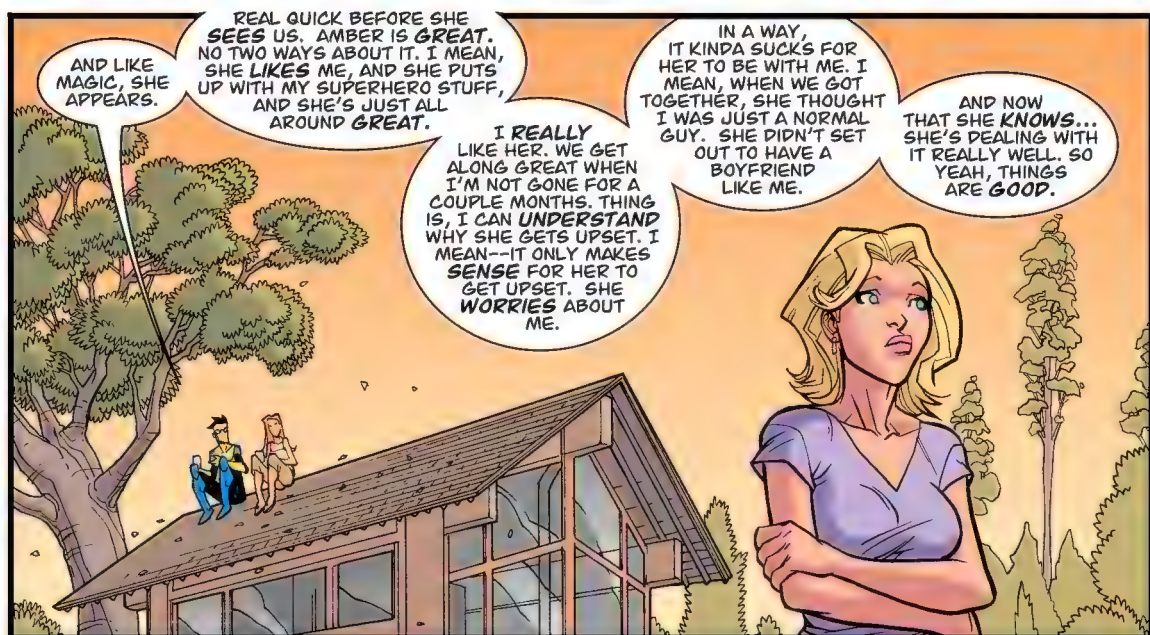
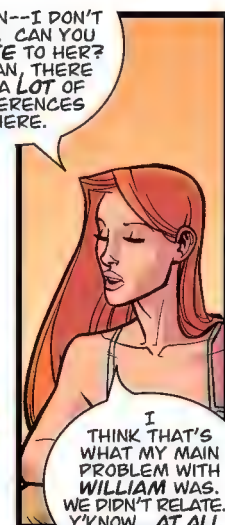
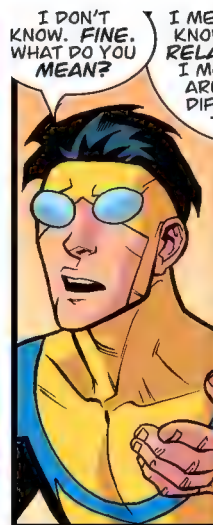
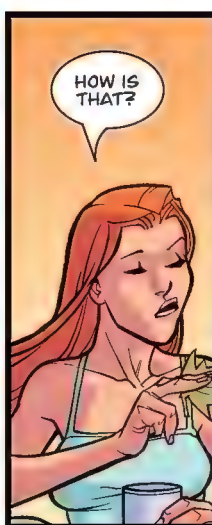
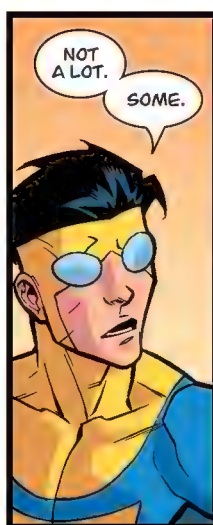
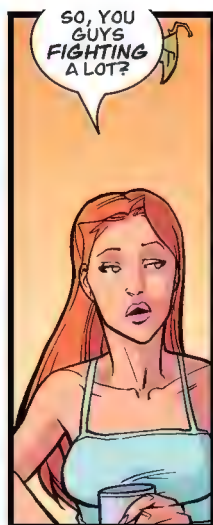
SO... AMBER STILL SLEEPING? WHERE IS SHE?

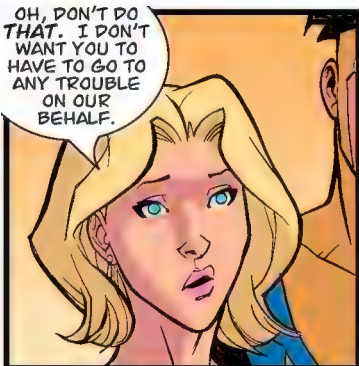
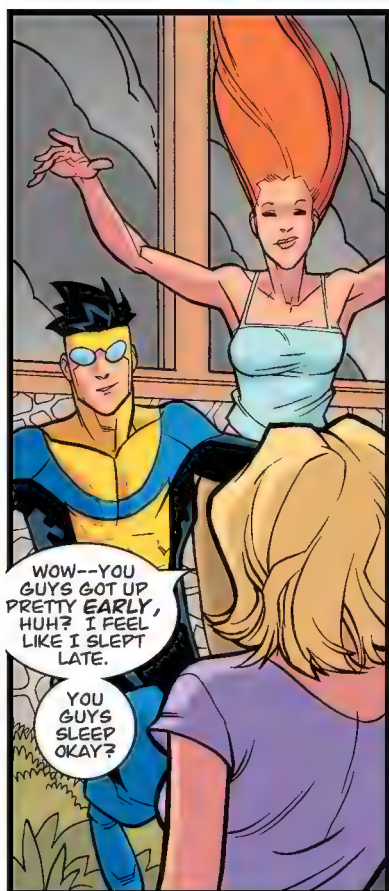
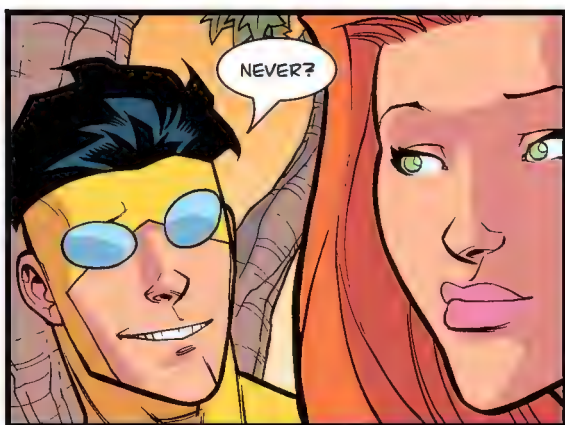
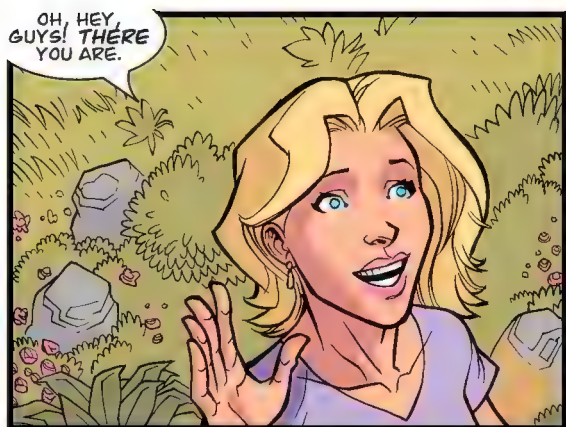
WHEN I LEFT THIS MORNING SHE WAS. I GUESS SHE STILL IS.

HOW ARE THINGS GOING BETWEEN YOU?

GOOD, I GUESS. I HAVEN'T REALLY GOTTEN TO SEE HER MUCH, BEING OUT IN SPACE AND ALL.

SHE CERTAINLY WASN'T HAPPY ABOUT THAT.





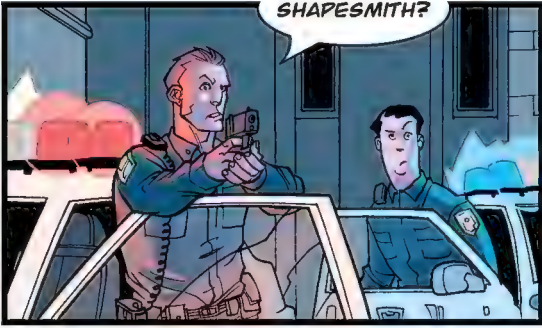


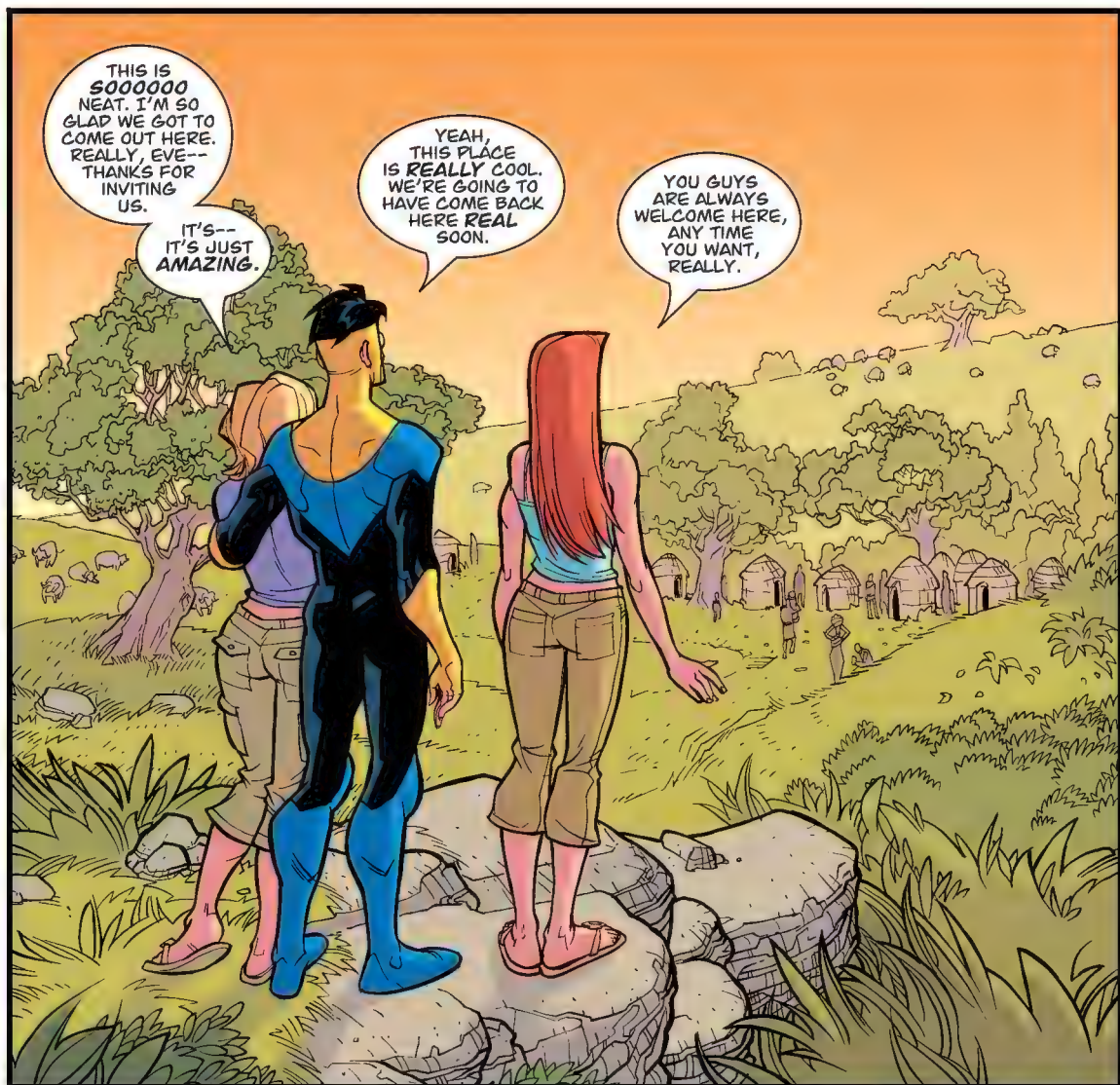


TAKE
THAT, LIZARD
LEAGUE!

I BET
YOU'LL THINK
TWICE BEFORE
YOU AGAIN
FACE--

**THE
SHAPSMITH!**





THIS IS
SOOOOOO
NEAT. I'M SO
GLAD WE GOT TO
COME OUT HERE.
REALLY, EVE--
THANKS FOR
INVITING
US.

IT'S--
IT'S JUST
AMAZING.

YEAH,
THIS PLACE
IS **REALLY** COOL.
WE'RE GOING TO
HAVE COME BACK
HERE **REAL**
SOON.

YOU GUYS
ARE ALWAYS
WELCOME HERE,
ANY TIME
YOU WANT,
REALLY.

I CAN'T
WAIT TO TELL
BRIDGET
ALL ABOUT
IT.

WELL, YOU
CAN'T EXACTLY
DO THAT. HOW
IN THE HECK ARE
YOU GOING TO
EXPLAIN GOING TO
AFRICA FOR THE
WEEKEND?

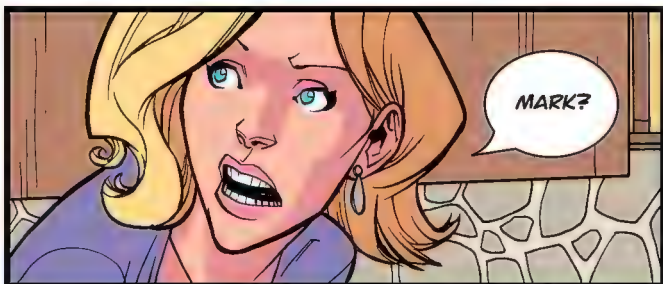
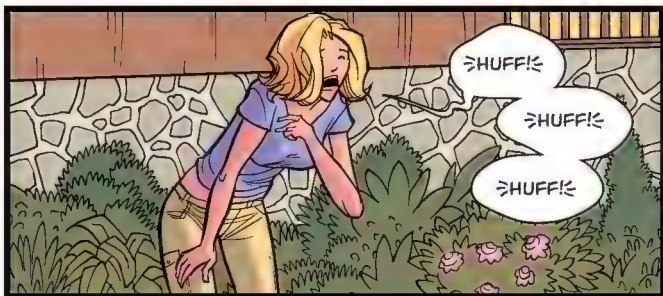
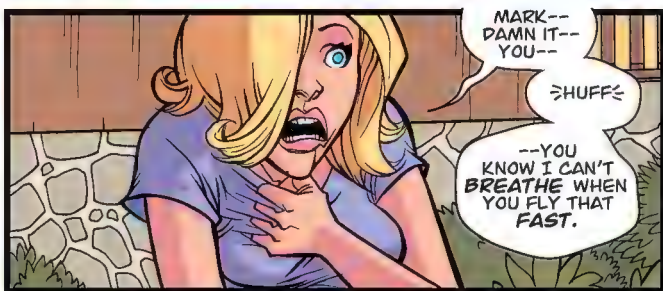
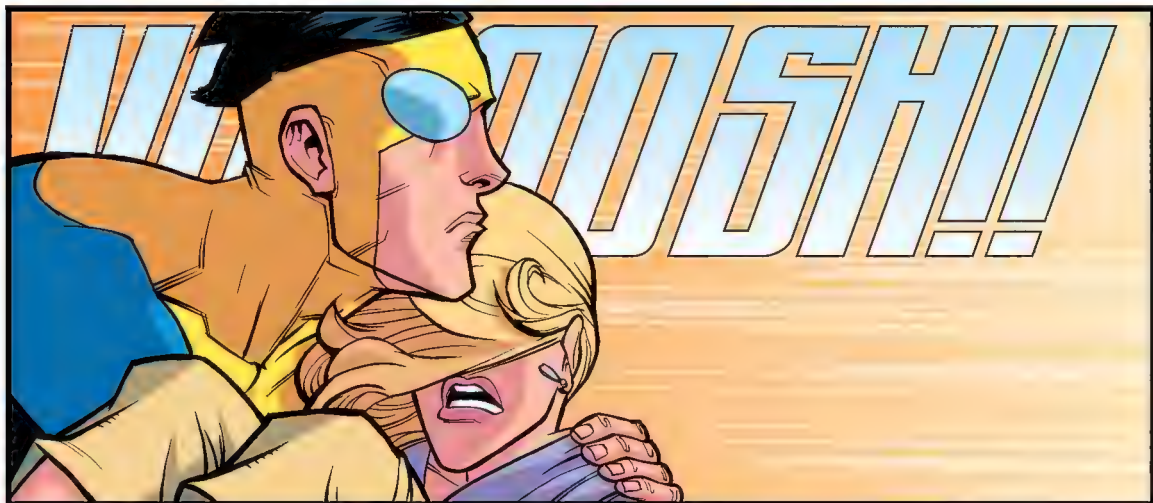
JEEZ, I HADN'T
REALLY THOUGHT
ABOUT THAT. OF
COURSE I CAN'T
TELL HER... OR
ANYONE.

IT'LL
HAVE TO BE
OUR SECRET,
THEN.

DO YOU
HEAR
THAT?

HEAR WHAT?

DESPITE
CONTRARY
POPULAR
BELIEF--I
DO **NOT** HAVE
SUPER-
HEARING.



AN UNDISCLOSED LOCATION.

THIS WOULD BE EASIER IF YOU WOULD JUST ALLOW US TO DO THE PROCEDURE AT OUR PLACE.

THEN WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO TAKE THE TIME TO MOVE AND REASSEMBLE EVERYTHING.

NO! FOR WHAT I'M PAYING YOU-- YOU WILL DO EVERY SINGLE THING I ASK YOU TO-- MY WAY.

THIS ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE EASY.

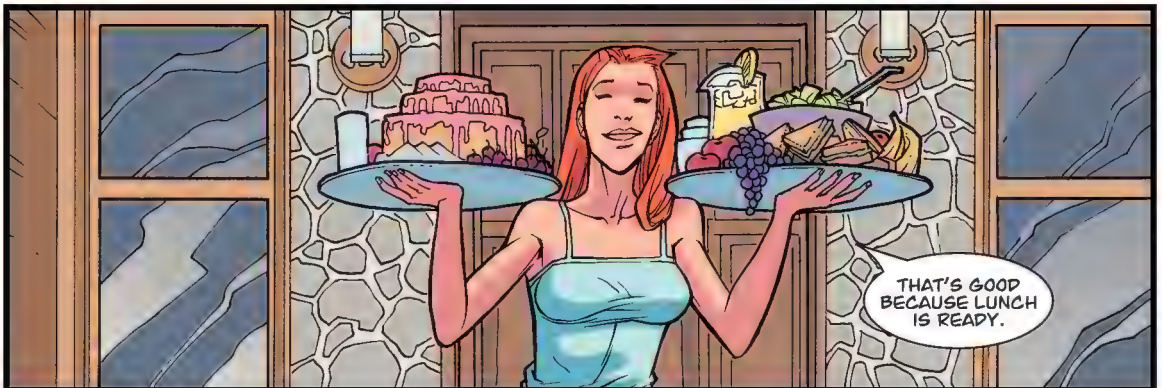
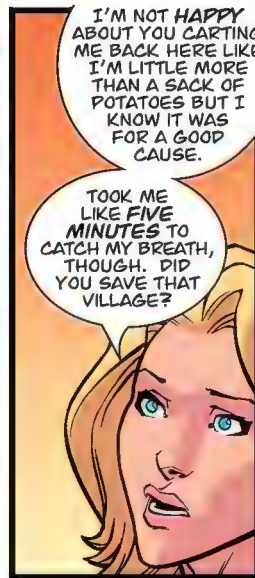
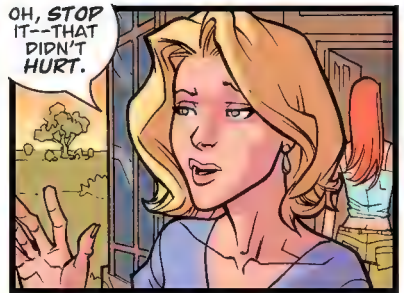
AND I WANT MY MIND-- ALL MY KNOWLEDGE-- ALL MY PERSONALITY-- I WANT THE CLONE TO BE PERFECT, NO DIFFERENCES BEYOND THE PHYSICAL.

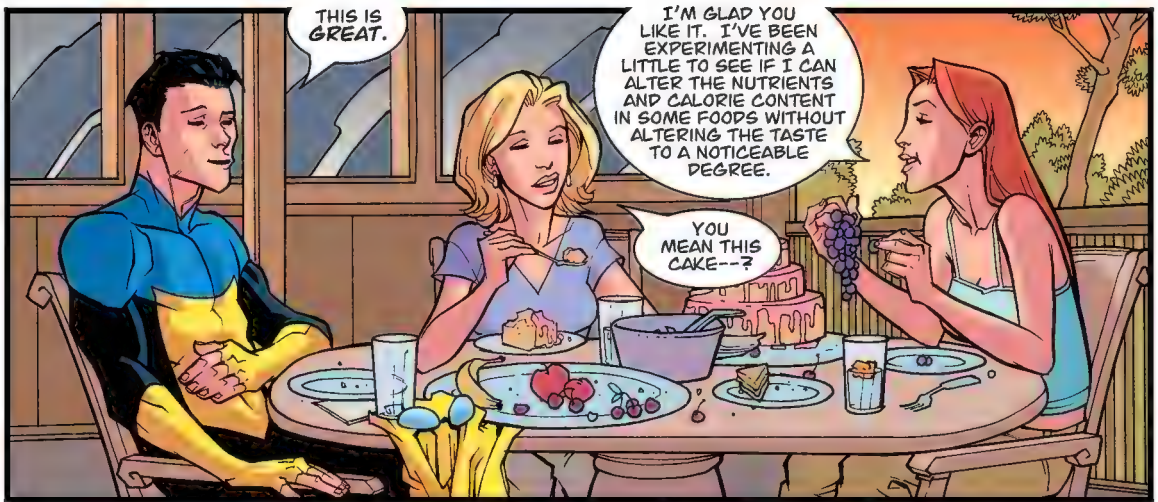
I CLONED THIS ONE A FEW SHORT WEEKS AGO--AND HE CAN'T EVEN TELL. IT'S A SEAMLESS PROCESS. THAT'S WHY YOU'VE CONTACTED US.

RIGHT-- I'M THE CLONE. THAT'LL BE THE DAY.

THAT IS SOMETHING I HAVE ALREADY TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT.

KEEP IN MIND--THE PROCESS WILL NOT ERASE YOUR MIND--OR TRANSFER YOU INTO THE NEW BODY--IT WILL ONLY CREATE A PERFECT DUPLICATE... IN THIS CASE AN IMPROVED ONE.





HAS ABOUT HALF THE CALORIES AND ALL THE VITAMINS AND CRAP OF A STALK OF BROCCOLI.

IT TASTE FUNNY?

JUST A LITTLE-- BUT IT'S STILL GREAT.

AND AT HALF THE CALORIES I CAN EAT TWICE AS MUCH.

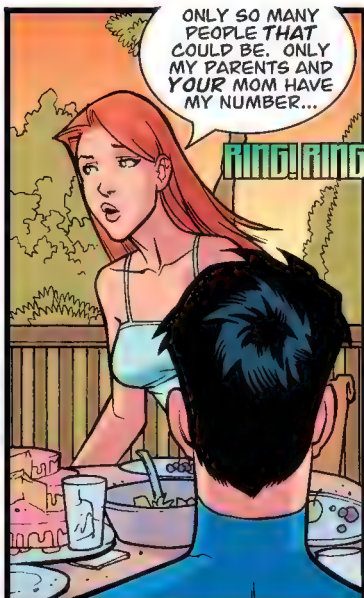
SLOW DOWN THERE, HON'. I'VE STILL GOT TO CARRY YOU BACK OVER THE ATLANTIC LATER TODAY.

OH, SHUT UP.

EVE-- PLEASE--YOU'VE GOT TO COME BACK TO SCHOOL WITH ME. YOU COULD LIVE IN MY DORM--ATTEND SOME CLASSES--MAKE FOOD FOR ME. YOU NEED TO GO TO COLLEGE STILL, RIGHT?

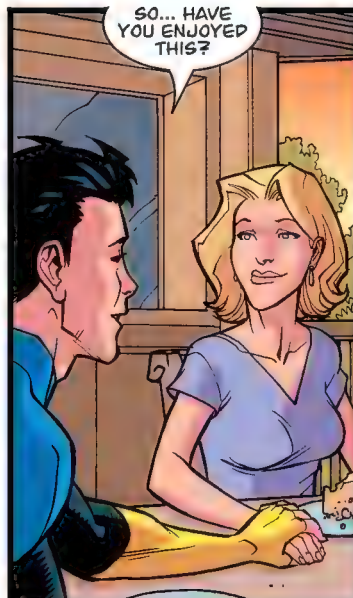
WHY? I DON'T NEED TO LEARN A TRADE. EVERYTHING I NEED--I CAN JUST MAKE.

RING! RING!

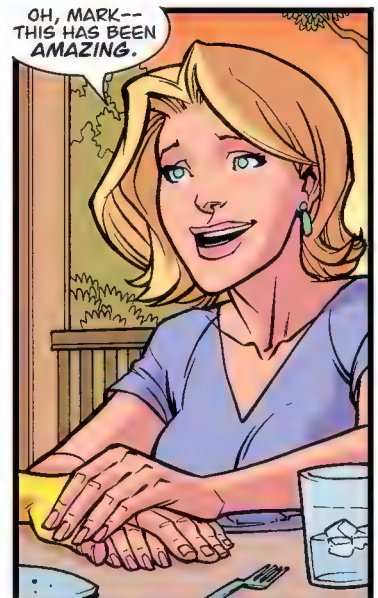


ONLY SO MANY PEOPLE THAT COULD BE. ONLY MY PARENTS AND YOUR MOM HAVE MY NUMBER...

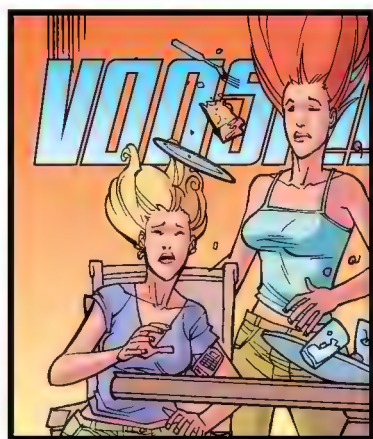
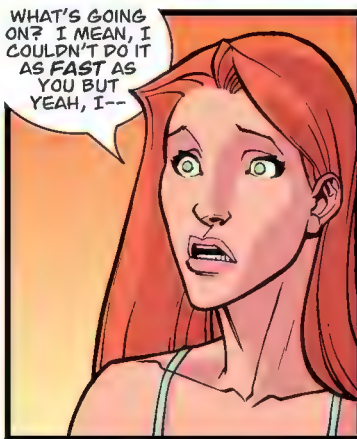
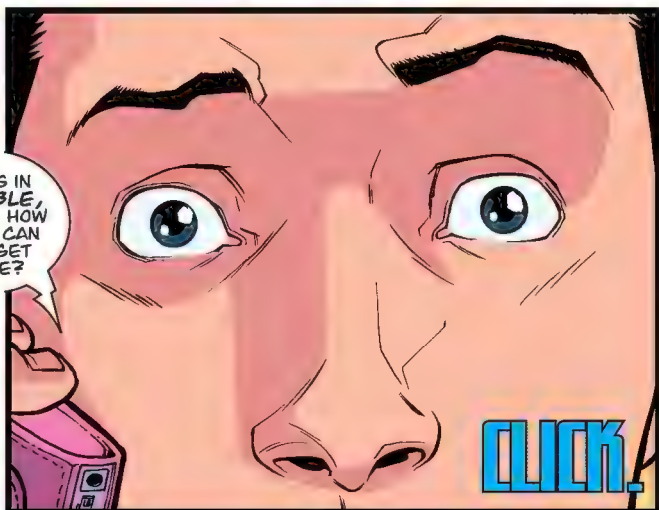
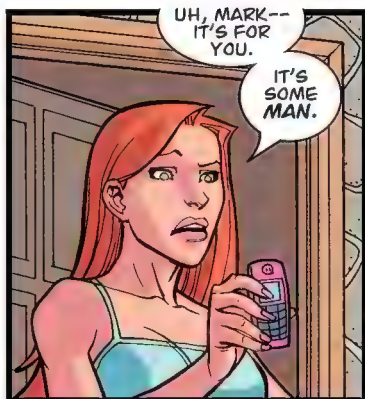
RING! RING!

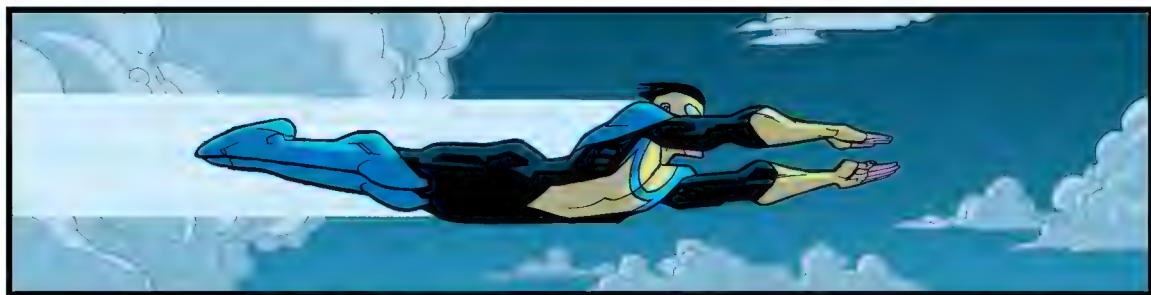


SO... HAVE YOU ENJOYED THIS?



OH, MARK-- THIS HAS BEEN AMAZING.







WELCOME
HOME, MARK
GRAYSON.

I'M
IMPRESSED.
YOU MADE
GOOD
TIME.



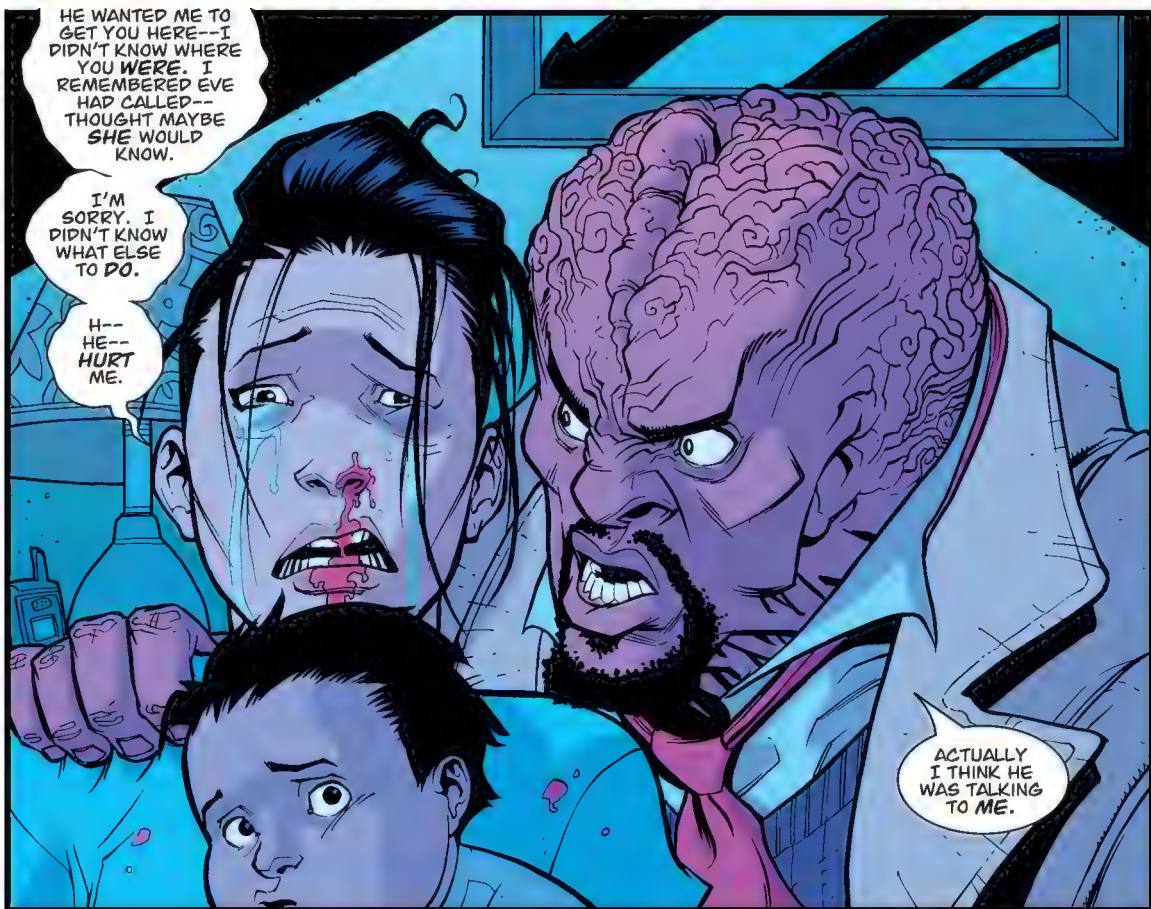
CHAPTER THREE





WHO ARE
YOU?!
WHAT DO YOU
WANT?! WHY
ARE YOU
HERE?!

TALK!



HE WANTED ME TO
GET YOU HERE--I
DIDN'T KNOW WHERE
YOU WERE. I
REMEMBERED EVE
HAD CALLED--
THOUGHT MAYBE
SHE WOULD
KNOW.

I'M
SORRY. I
DIDN'T KNOW
WHAT ELSE
TO DO.

H--
HE--
HURT
ME.

ACTUALLY
I THINK HE
WAS TALKING
TO ME.



LET.

HER.

GO.



NOT
YET.

I'VE
LEARNED A
LOT ABOUT YOU,
MARK GRAYSON.
LOTS OF THINGS.
I KNOW HOW
VIOLENT YOU CAN
GET WHEN YOU'RE
MAD--LIKE RIGHT
NOW. I KNOW
YOU GET THAT
FROM YOUR
FATHER.



DID YOU KNOW
YOUR IDENTITY IS
PUBLIC IN ALMOST
FORTY PERCENT OF THE REALITIES
YOU EXIST
IN?

THAT'S
ALMOST HALF.
THAT MEANS
YOU'RE
CARELESS.



WHAT
DO YOU
WANT?



YOU SEE
THIS? I'M A
FREAK--A
DEFORMED FREAK--
SO I GUESS IT'S
UNDERSTANDABLE
THAT YOU WOULDN'T
RECOGNIZE
ME!

WHEN
YOU SAW ME
BEFORE--WHEN
YOU DID THIS
TO ME--I LOOKED
A TAD MORE
NORMAL!!



OH, GOD--
YOU'RE THAT
GUY...



"THAT
GUY?!"

THAT'S
ALL YOU
REMEMBER
OF ME? THAT
I WAS THAT
GUY?!



I'M ANGSTROM
LEVY! THE NEXT TIME
YOU FORGET MY
NAME--IT WILL BE
BECAUSE YOU'RE
DEAD!

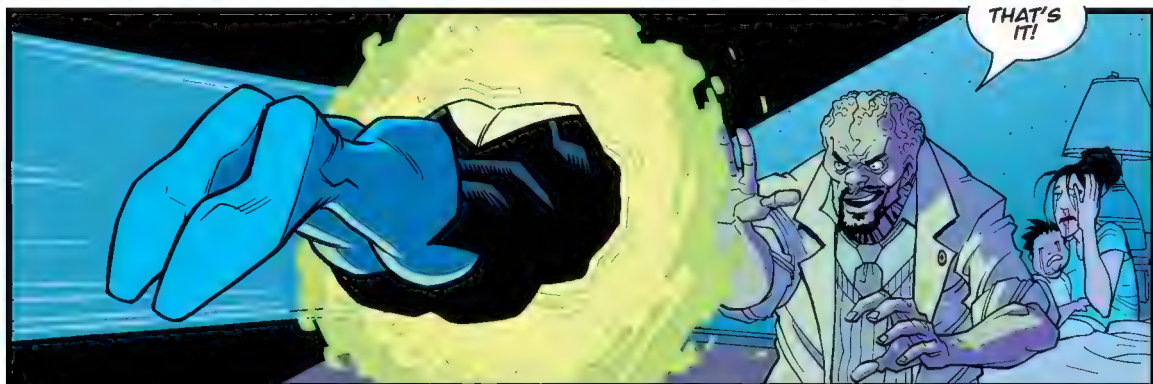
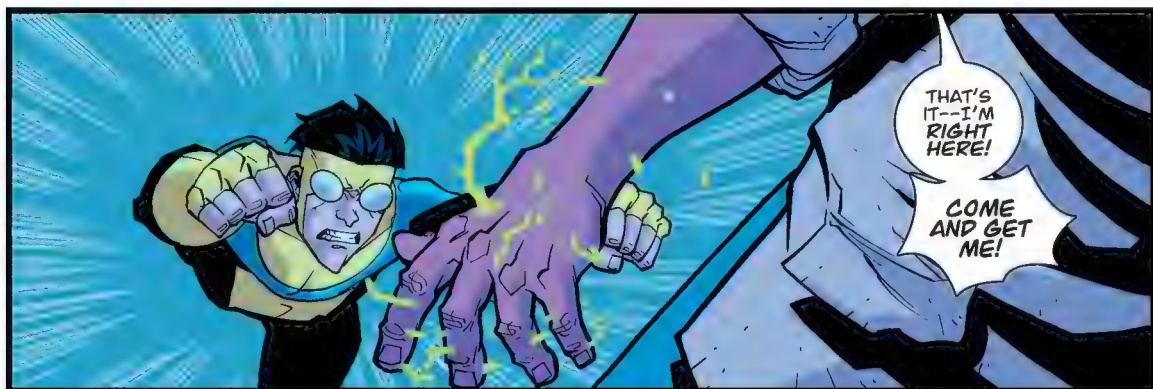
I HAD A GIFT--I WAS JUST TRYING TO IMPROVE IT. I WAS JUST COPYING THE MEMORIES FROM MY COUNTERPARTS FROM OTHER REALITIES. YOU HAD TO HALT THAT PROCESS--YOU CAUSED THE MACHINE TO OVERLOAD--TO EXPLODE!

I WAS CRUSHED! I HAD INTERNAL ORGAN DAMAGE! I HAD TO FIND A REALITY WITH THE BEST SURGEONS TO REBUILD MY BODY!

THE GREATEST MINDS IN A DOZEN REALITIES COULDN'T FIND A WAY TO FIX MY BRAIN! I WILL ALWAYS BE A FREAK!

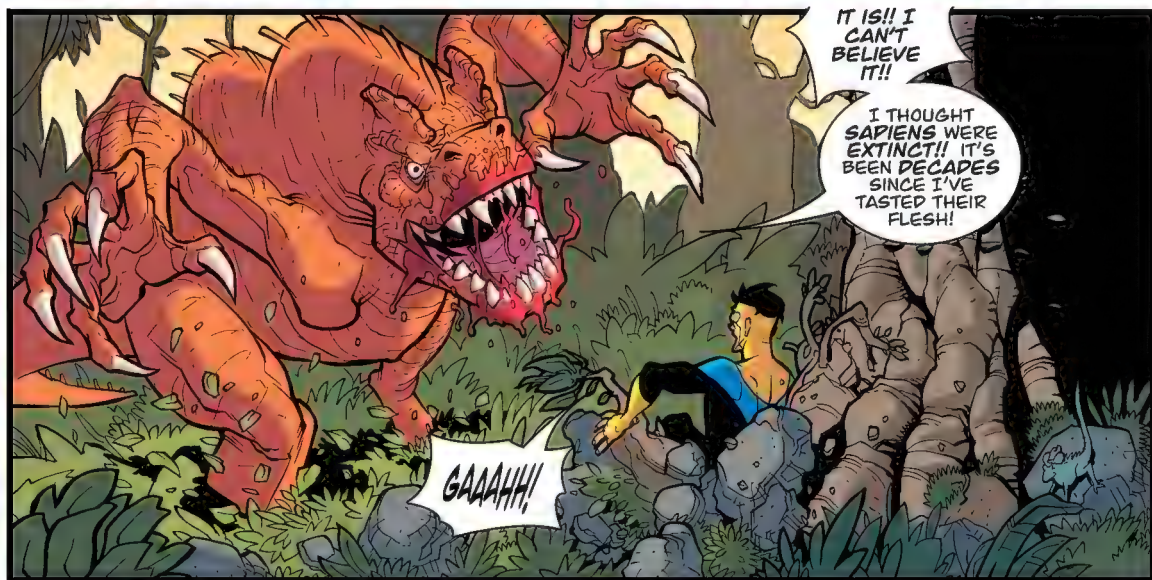
WRAMMM!

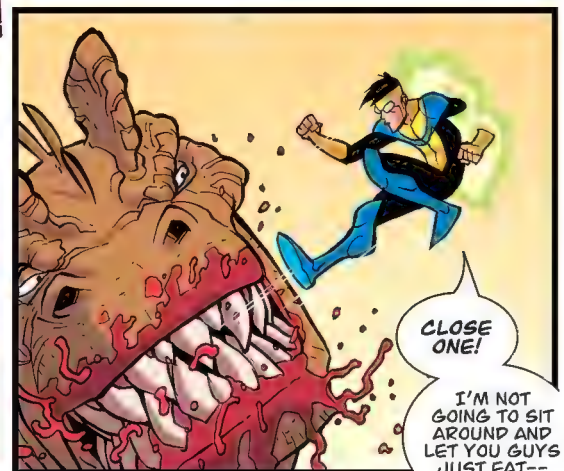
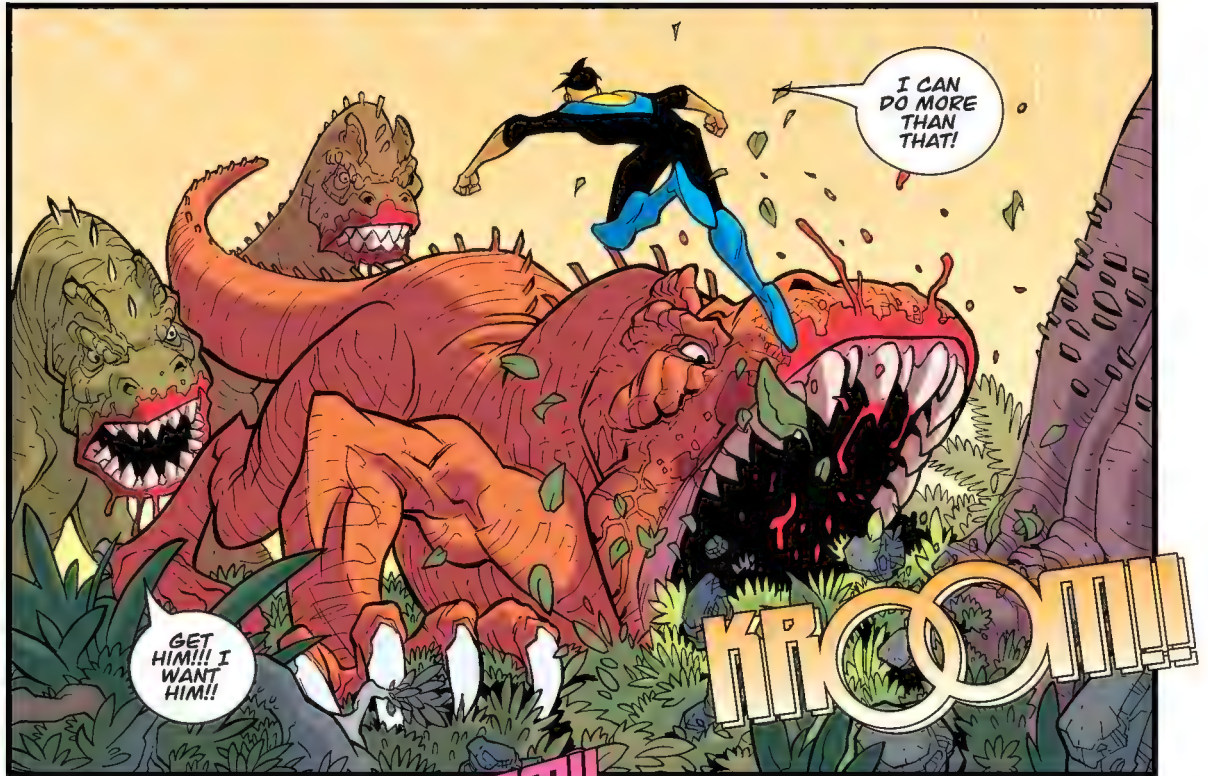
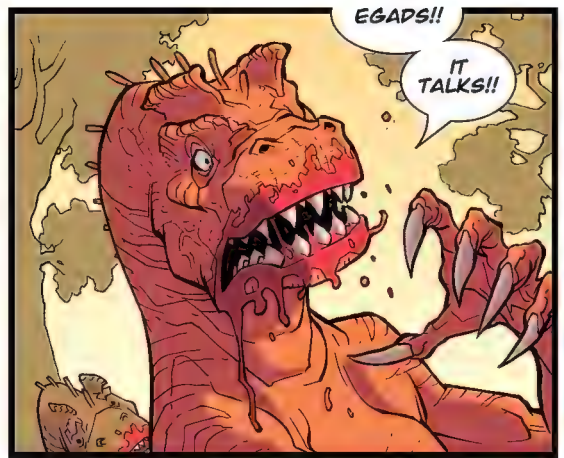
BECAUSE OF YOU!

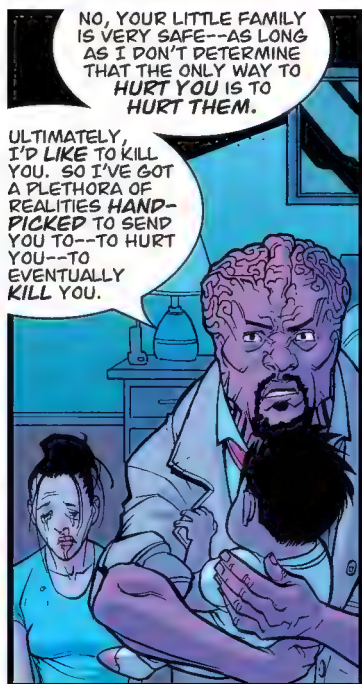
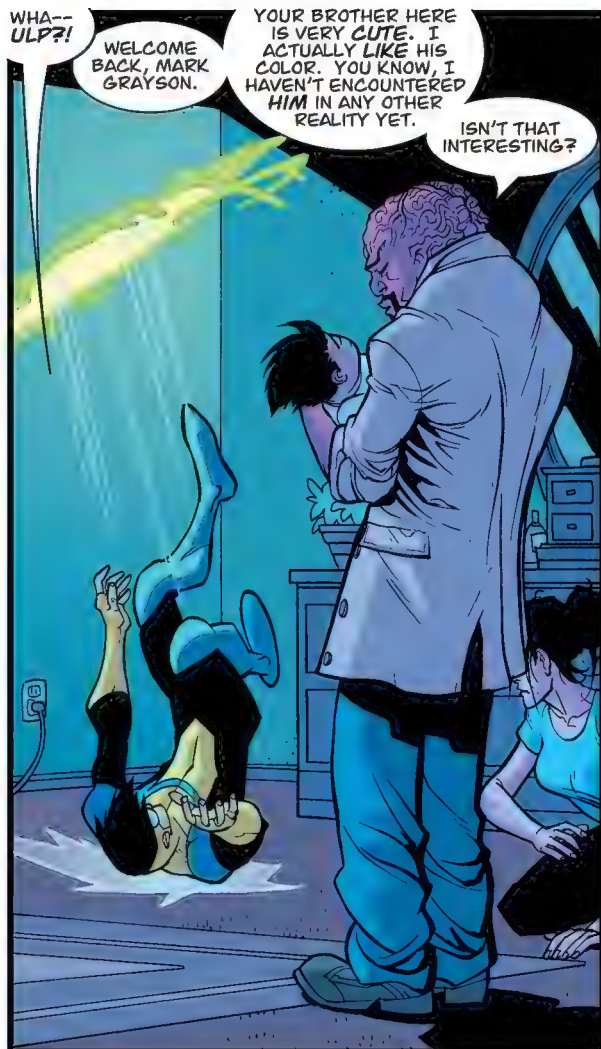


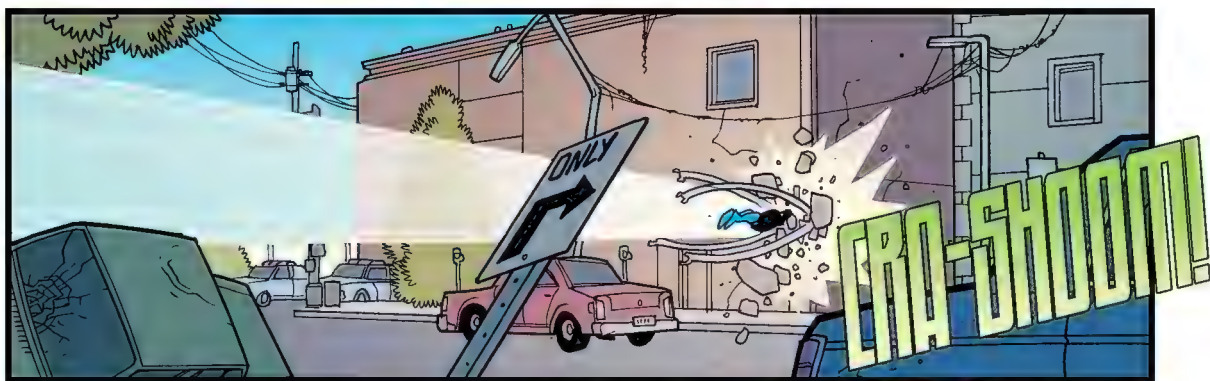


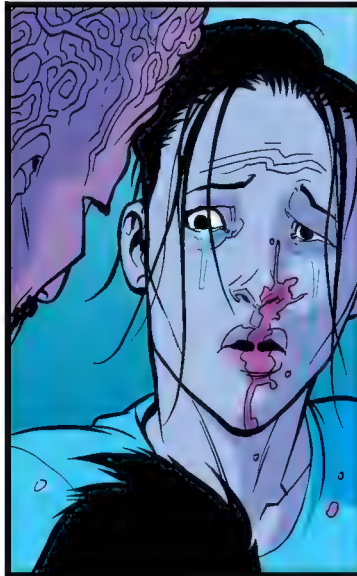
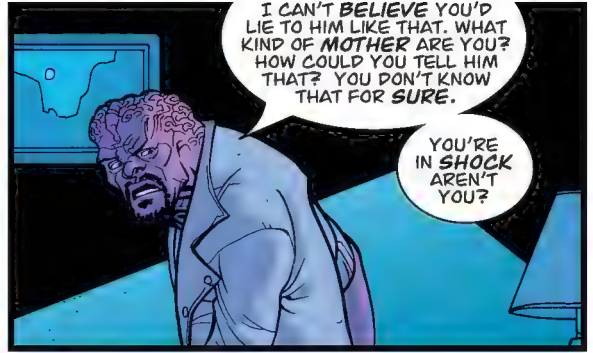
WHOA!!



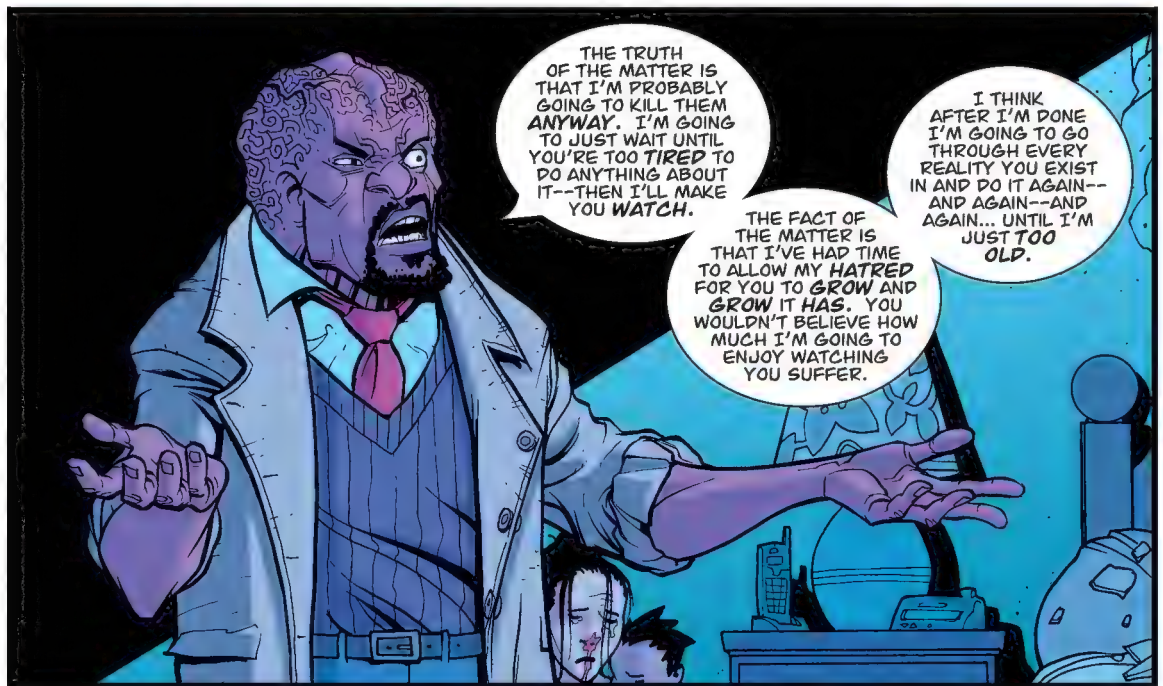


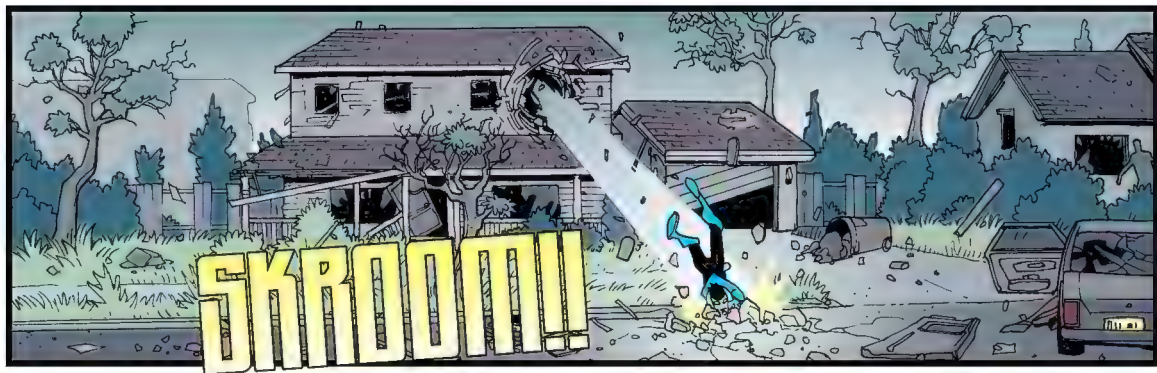










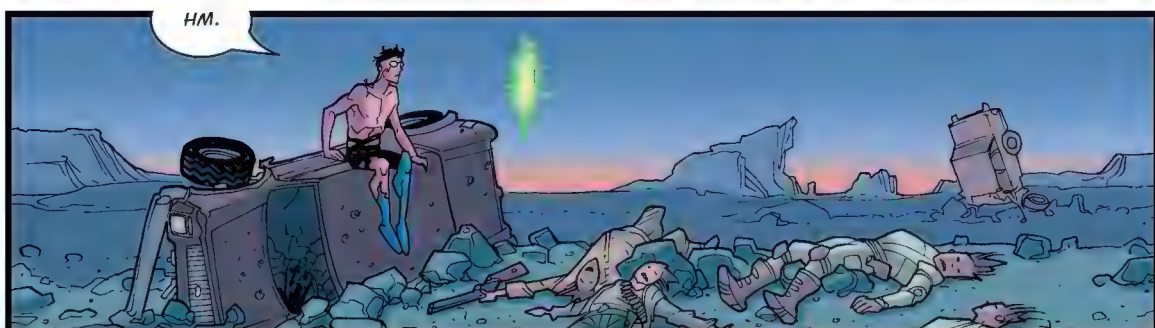
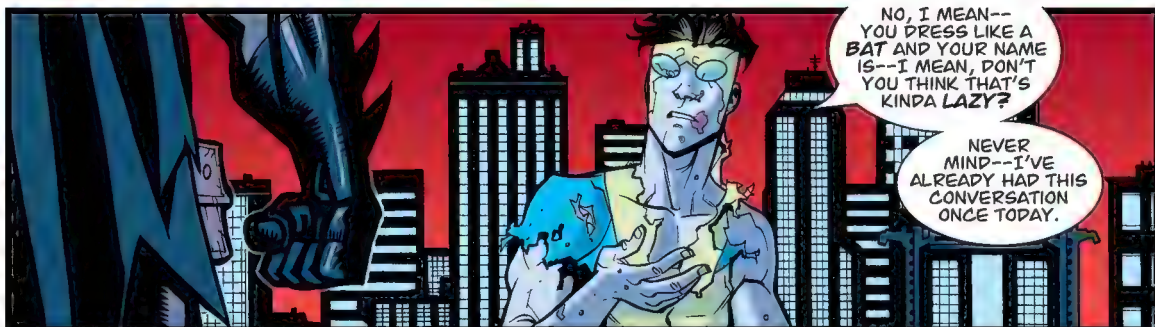


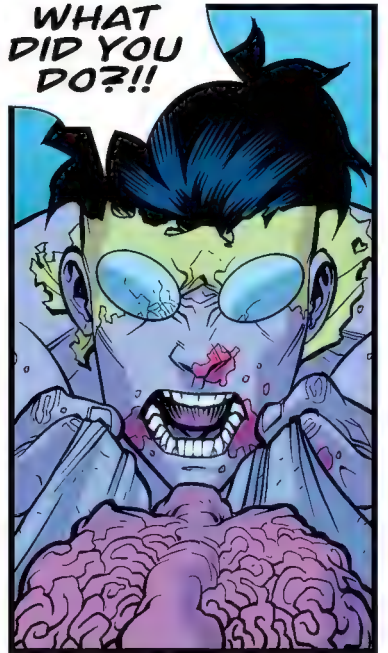
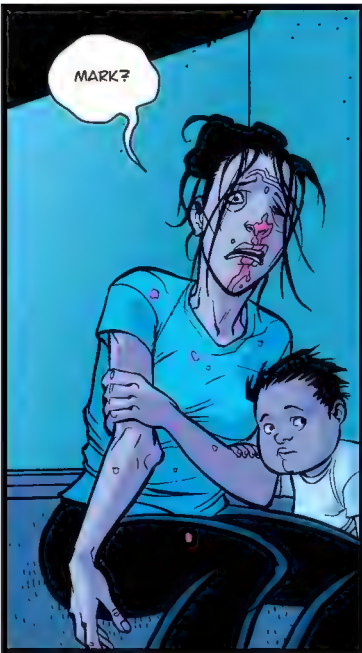
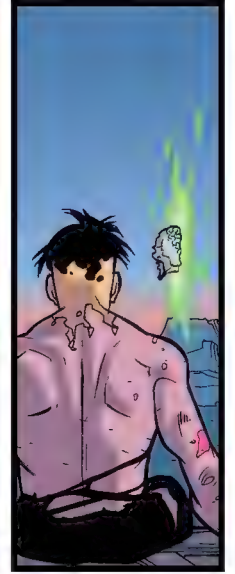


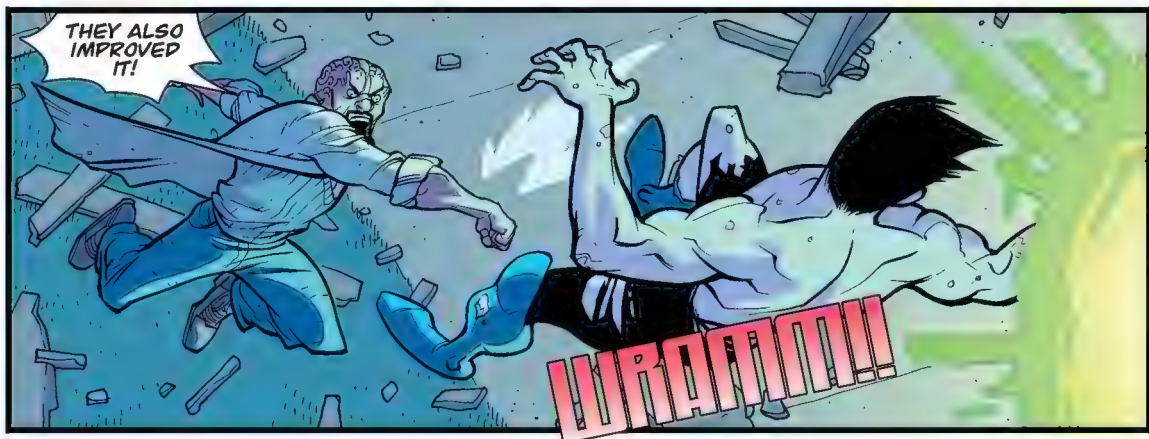
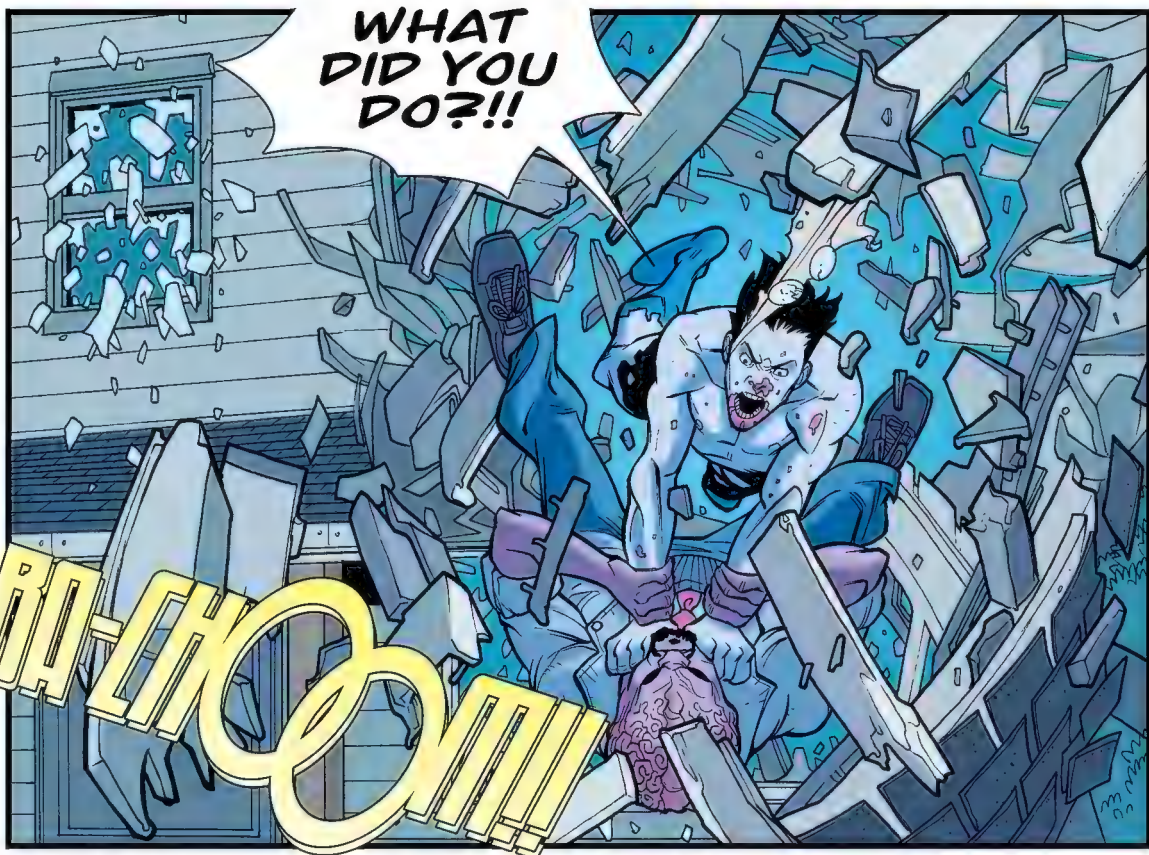
SOMETHING HAS
HAPPENED.

NOW HE OPENS
ANOTHER PORTAL AS
SOON AS I COME OUT
OF ONE. I DON'T EVEN
SEE HIM. I DON'T SEE
MY MOM OR MY BROTHER.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S
GOING ON.

I THINK HE'S
FINALLY REALIZING THIS
ISN'T WORKING. I HAVE TO
FIGURE OUT A WAY TO STOP
HIM WITHOUT HIM PUTTING A
PORTAL IN FRONT OF ME...
BEFORE HE DOES SOMETHING
DRASTIC TO THE PEOPLE I LOVE.







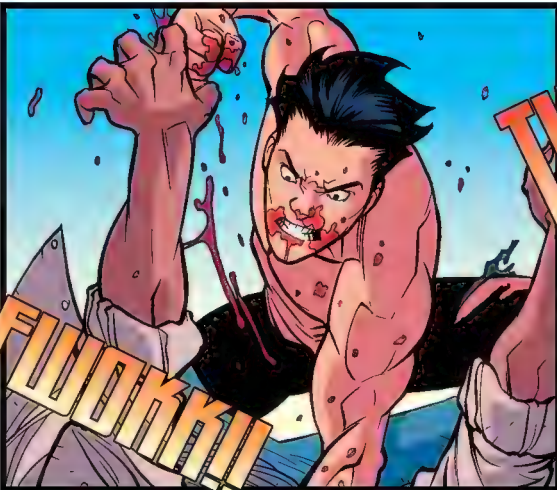
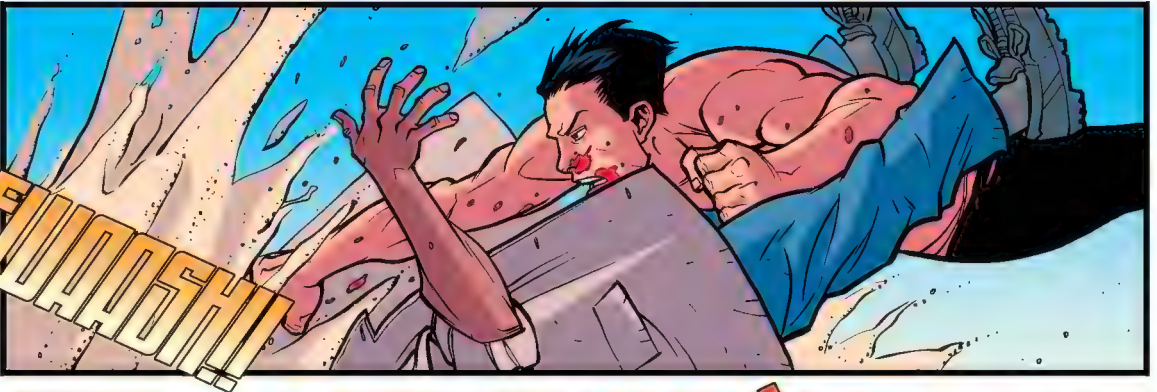
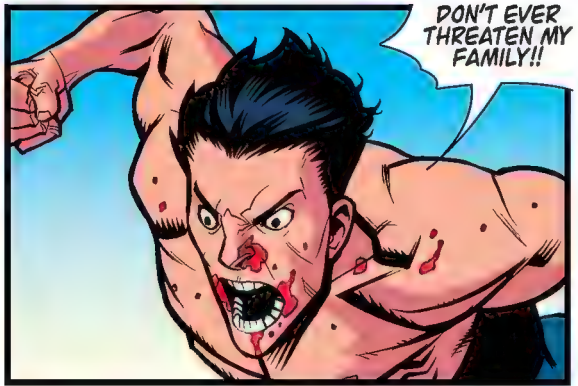


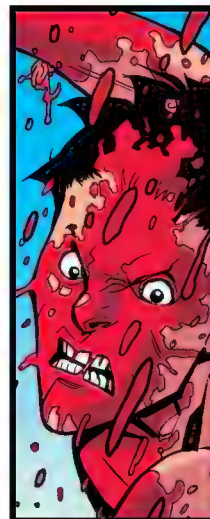
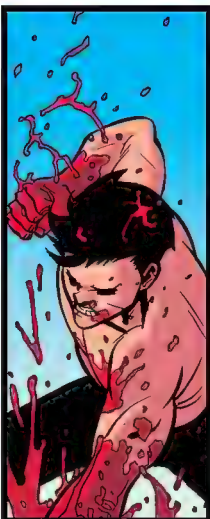
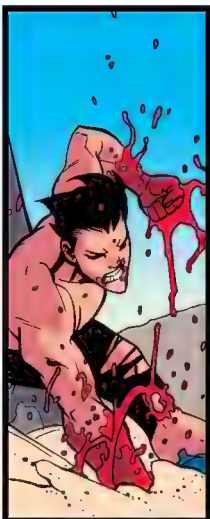
YOU DIDN'T
REALLY THINK I
WANTED YOU TO DIE IN
SOME RANDOM DIMENSION
I SENT YOU TO,
DID YOU?! YOU THINK
I WOULDN'T WANT
TO SEE YOU
DIE?!

WHY DO
YOU THINK I
WAS **SOFTENING**
YOU UP--TIRING
YOU BY SENDING
YOU ACROSS THE
MULTIVERSE?! I
DON'T KNOW EXACTLY
HOW STRONG YOU
REALLY
ARE.

I'M NOT
STUPID ENOUGH
TO THINK I COULD
BEST YOU IN HAND-
TO-HAND COMBAT--
BUT THAT IS WHAT
I WANT.

DID
YOU THINK
ANYTHING LESS
THAN KILLING
YOU WITH MY
BARE HANDS
WOULD SATISFY
ME?!





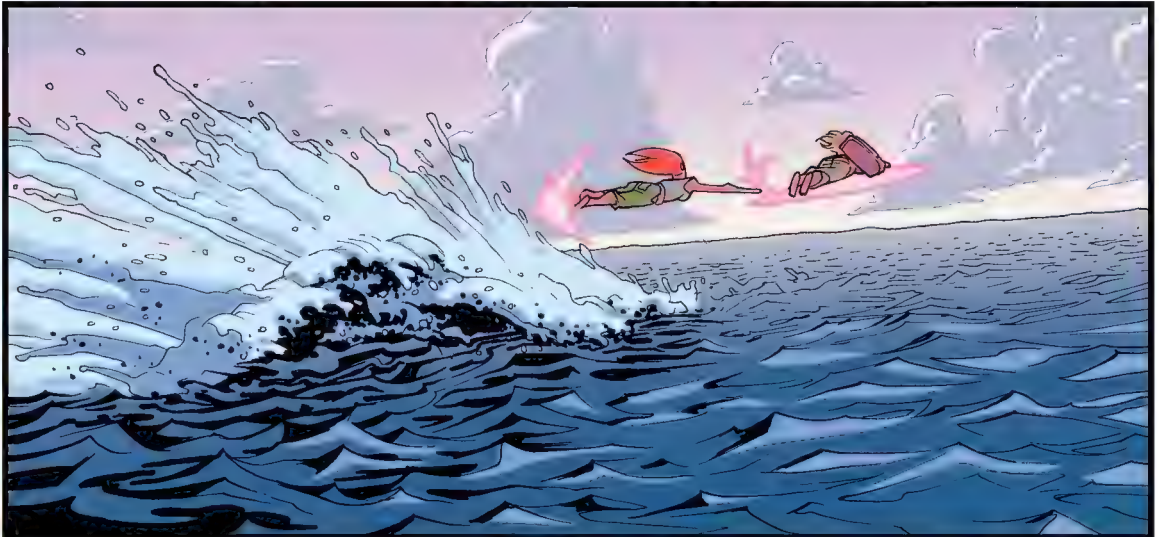
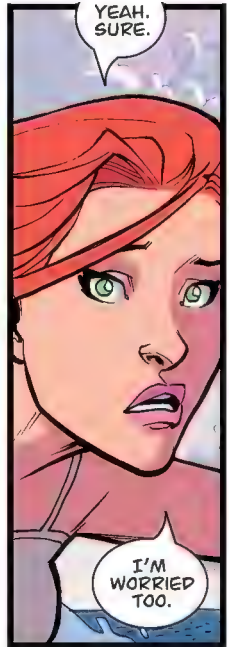
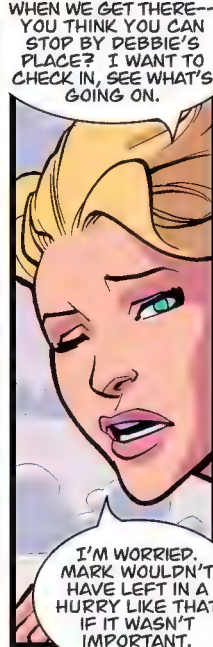
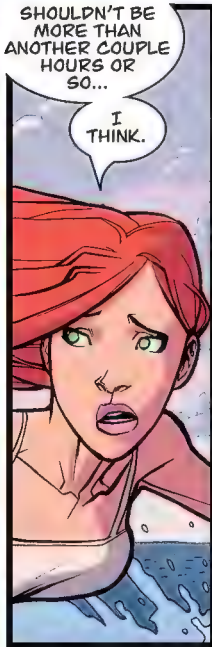
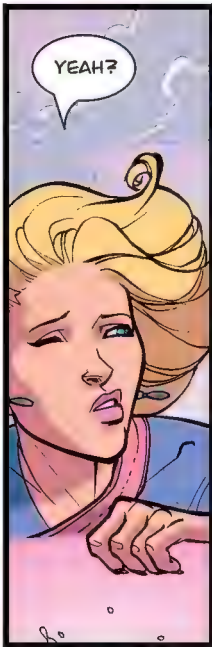
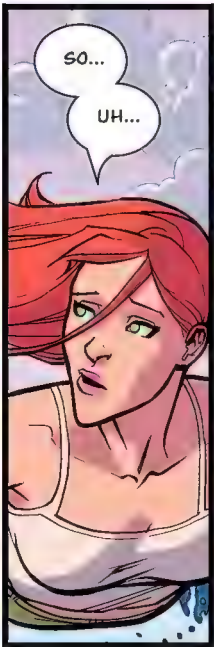
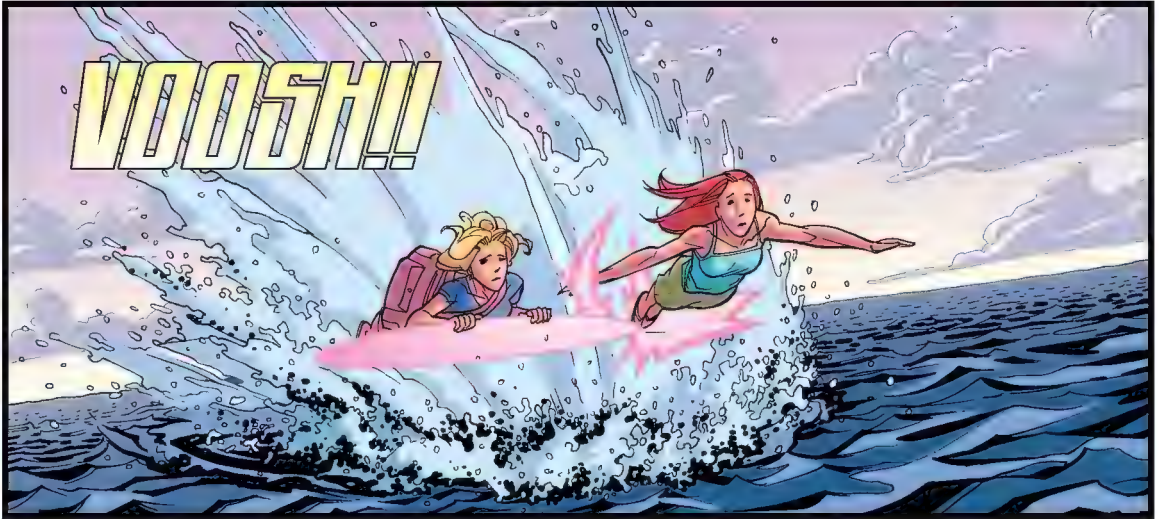


OH,
GOD...

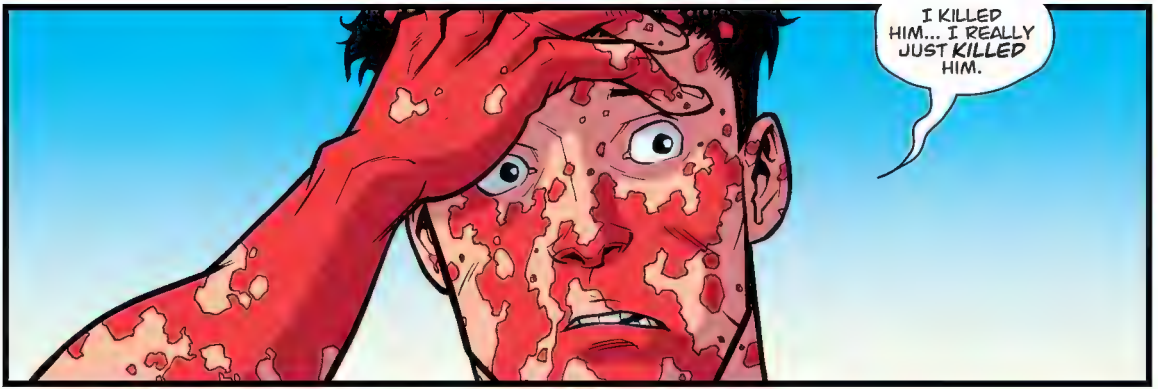


CHAPTER FOUR









I KILLED HIM... I REALLY JUST KILLED HIM.



I HAD TO... I DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE. I HAD TO KILL HIM. HE TRIED TO KILL ME. HE WAS GOING TO KILL MY MOM--MY BROTHER.

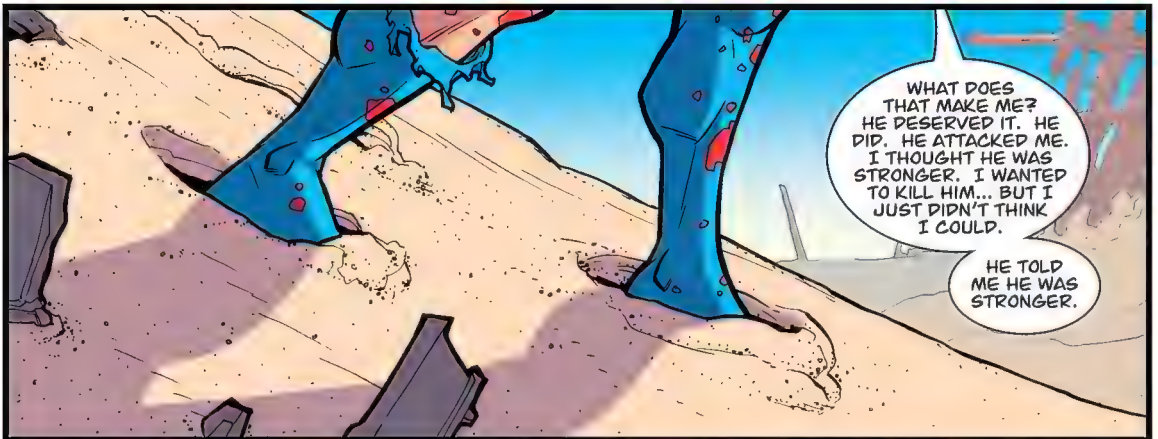
HE TRIED TO KILL ME FIRST.

HE MADE ME DO IT... IT WAS AN ACCIDENT... BUT HE MADE ME DO IT.

I DIDN'T WANT TO KILL HIM... I DIDN'T. I HAD TO. I WANTED TO HURT HIM. I HAD TO.

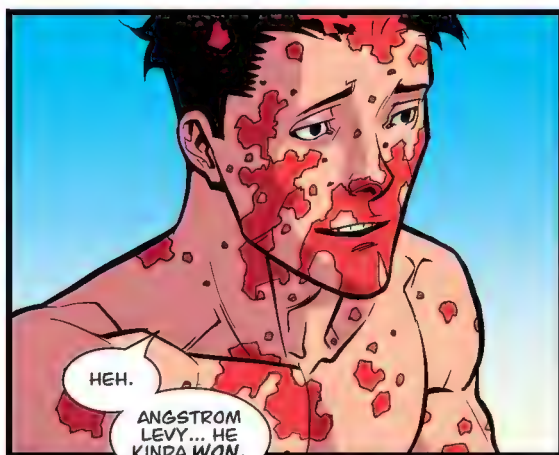
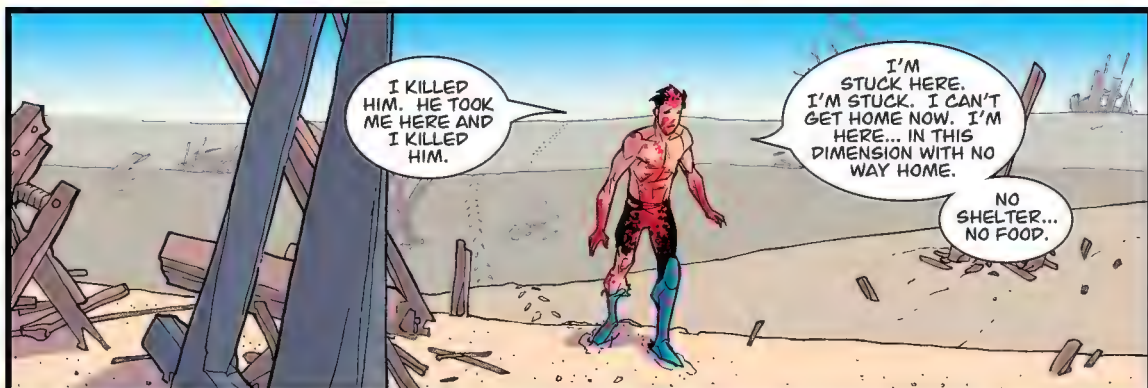
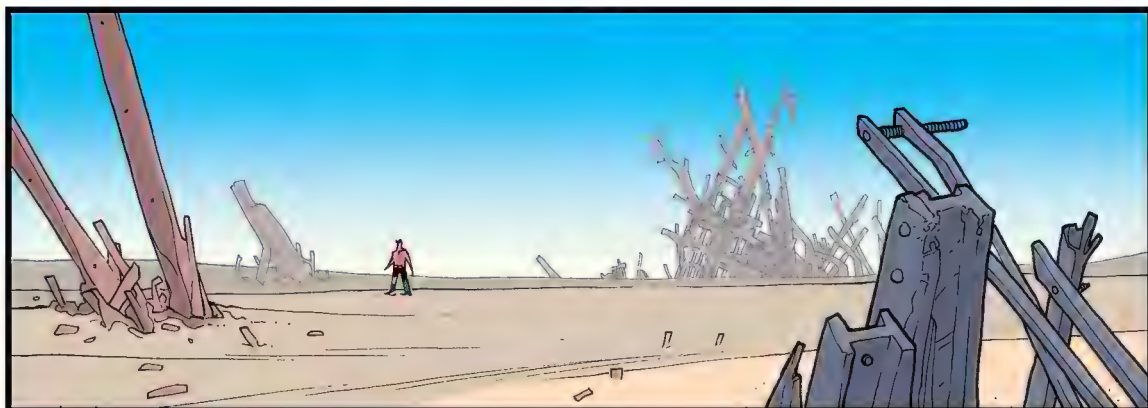


I WANTED TO KILL HIM.



WHAT DOES THAT MAKE ME? HE DESERVED IT. HE DID. HE ATTACKED ME. I THOUGHT HE WAS STRONGER. I WANTED TO KILL HIM... BUT I JUST DIDN'T THINK I COULD.

HE TOLD ME HE WAS STRONGER.



BACK IN MARK GRAYSON'S HOME DIMENSION.

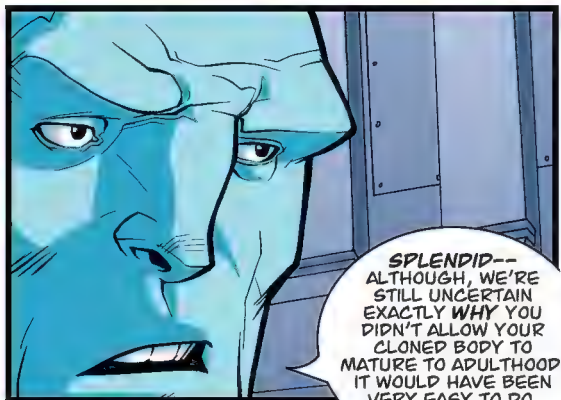
AN UNDISCLOSED LOCATION.

WELL? ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE RESULTS?

NOT THAT WE DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER.

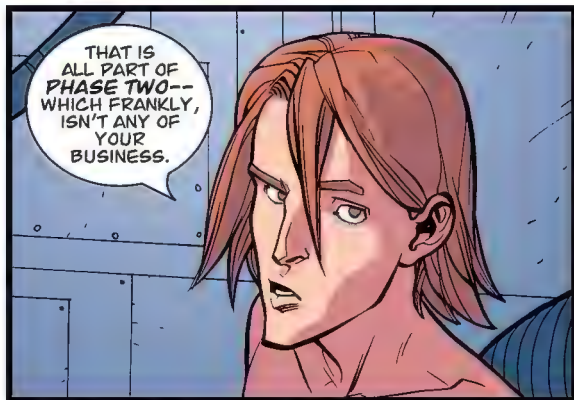
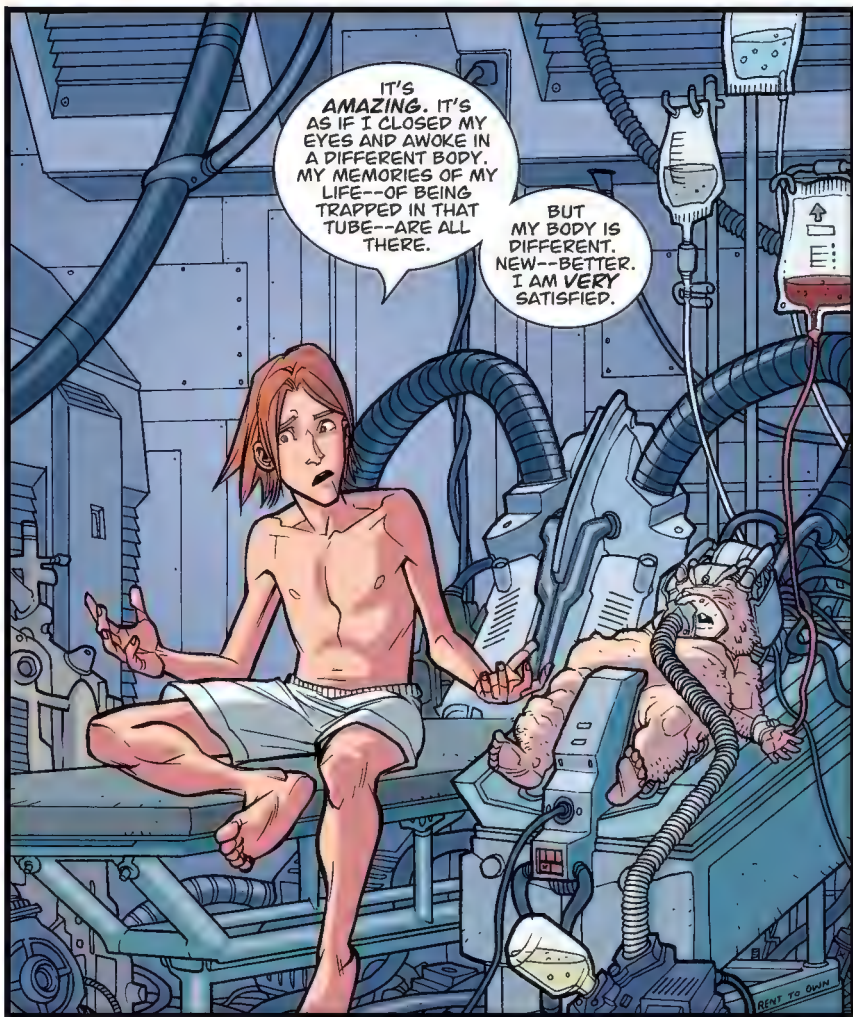
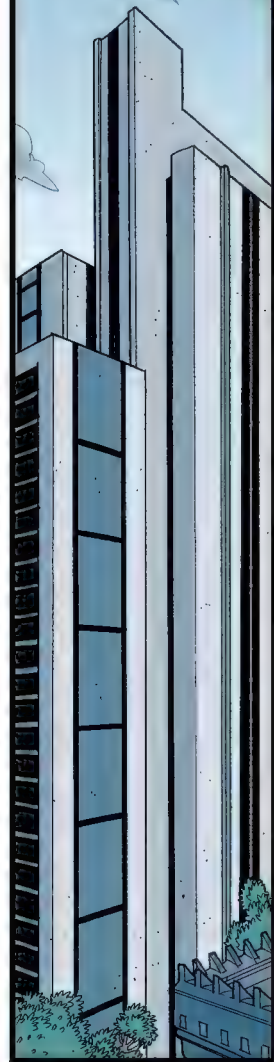
IT'S AMAZING. IT'S AS IF I CLOSED MY EYES AND AWOKE IN A DIFFERENT BODY. MY MEMORIES OF MY LIFE--OF BEING TRAPPED IN THAT TUBE--ARE ALL THERE.

BUT MY BODY IS DIFFERENT. NEW--BETTER. I AM VERY SATISFIED.

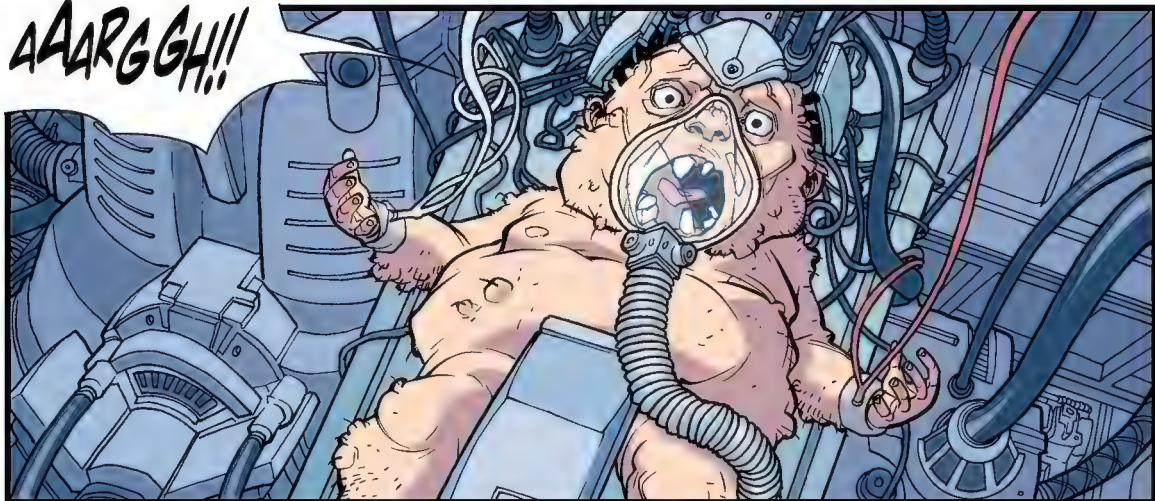


SPLENDID-- ALTHOUGH, WE'RE STILL UNCERTAIN EXACTLY WHY YOU DIDN'T ALLOW YOUR CLONED BODY TO MATURE TO ADULthood. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY EASY TO DO.

THAT IS ALL PART OF PHASE TWO-- WHICH FRANKLY, ISN'T ANY OF YOUR BUSINESS.

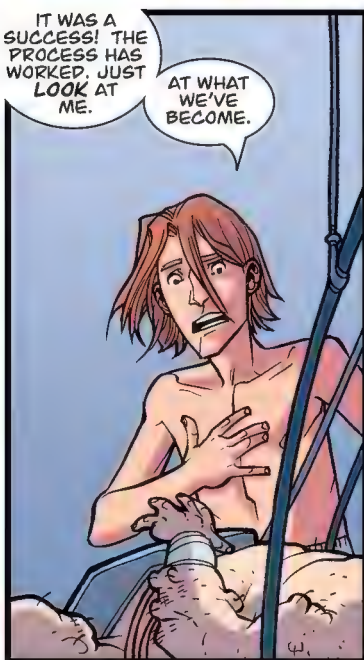


AAARGGH!!

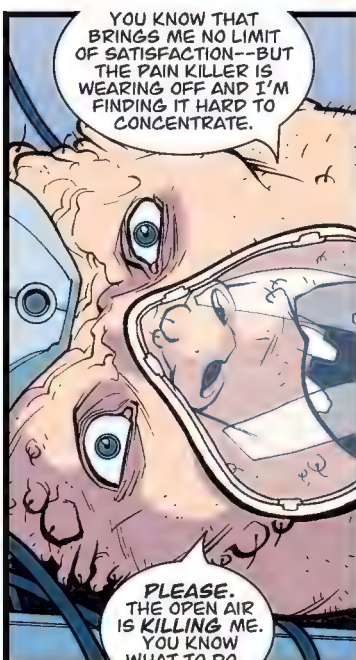


IT WAS A SUCCESS! THE PROCESS HAS WORKED. JUST LOOK AT ME.

AT WHAT WE'VE BECOME.



YOU KNOW THAT BRINGS ME NO LIMIT OF SATISFACTION--BUT THE PAIN KILLER IS WEARING OFF AND I'M FINDING IT HARD TO CONCENTRATE.



PLEASE. THE OPEN AIR IS KILLING ME. YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.

WHAT IS HE TALKING ABOUT?



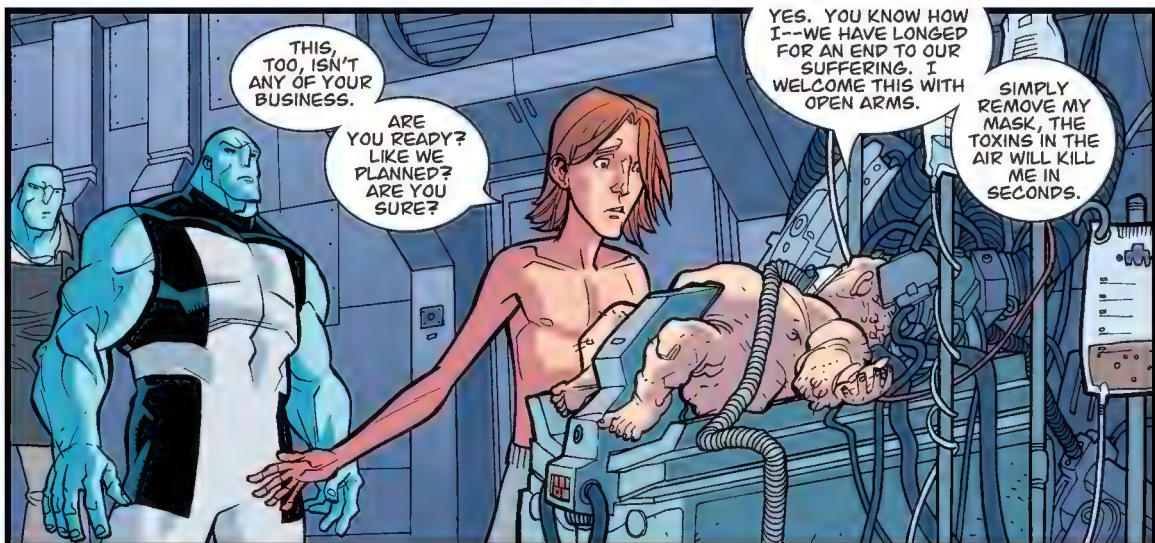
THIS, TOO, ISN'T ANY OF YOUR BUSINESS.

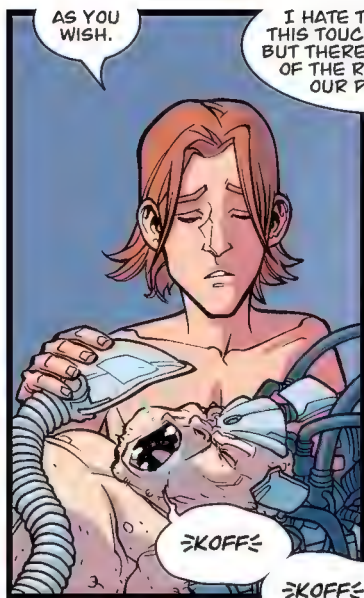
ARE YOU READY? LIKE WE PLANNED? ARE YOU SURE?



YES. YOU KNOW HOW I--WE HAVE LONGED FOR AN END TO OUR SUFFERING. I WELCOME THIS WITH OPEN ARMS.

SIMPLY REMOVE MY MASK, THE TOXINS IN THE AIR WILL KILL ME IN SECONDS.



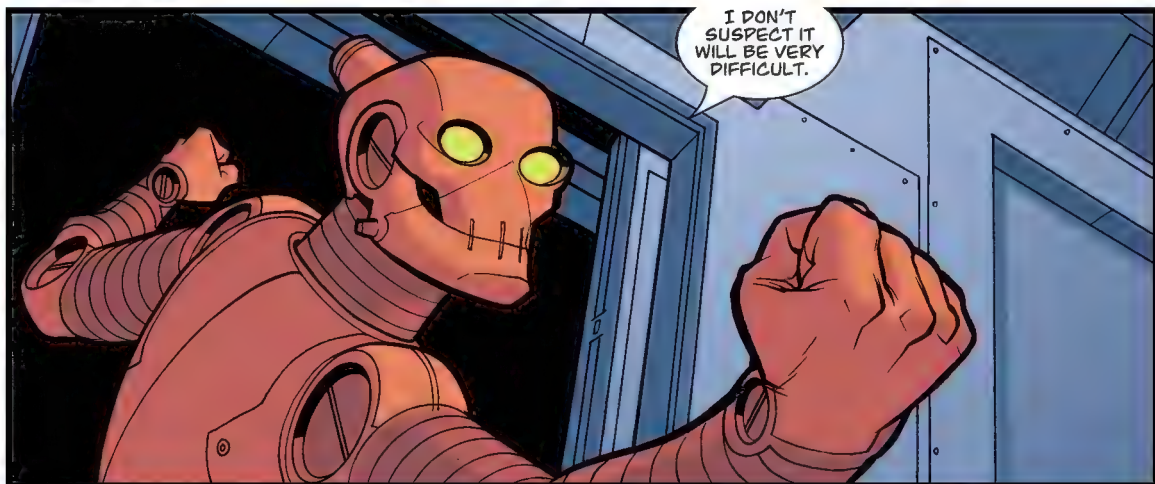


I HATE TO INTERRUPT THIS TOUCHING MOMENT, BUT THERE'S THE MATTER OF THE REMAINDER OF OUR PAYMENT.



THERE WILL BE NO SECOND PAYMENT. BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER. YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO SPEND IT WHERE YOU'RE GOING.





**BACK TO MARK GRAYSON,
STRANDED IN ANOTHER
DIMENSION.**

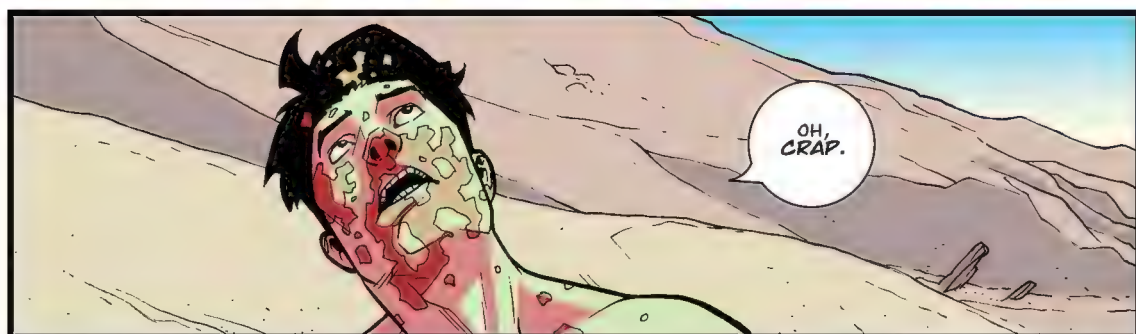
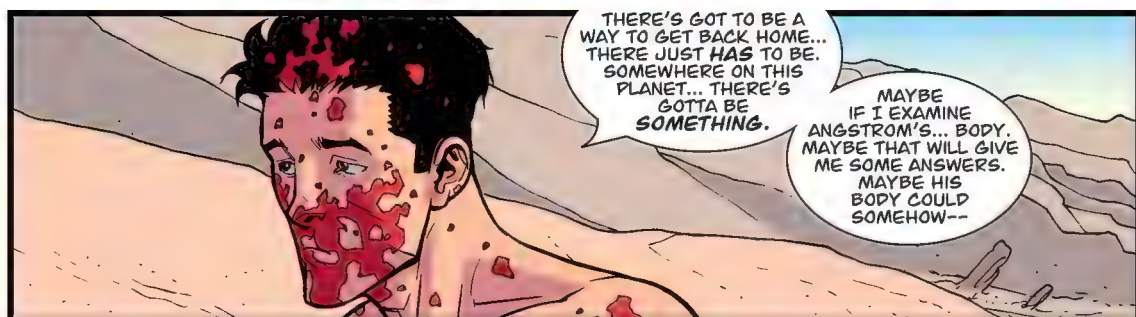
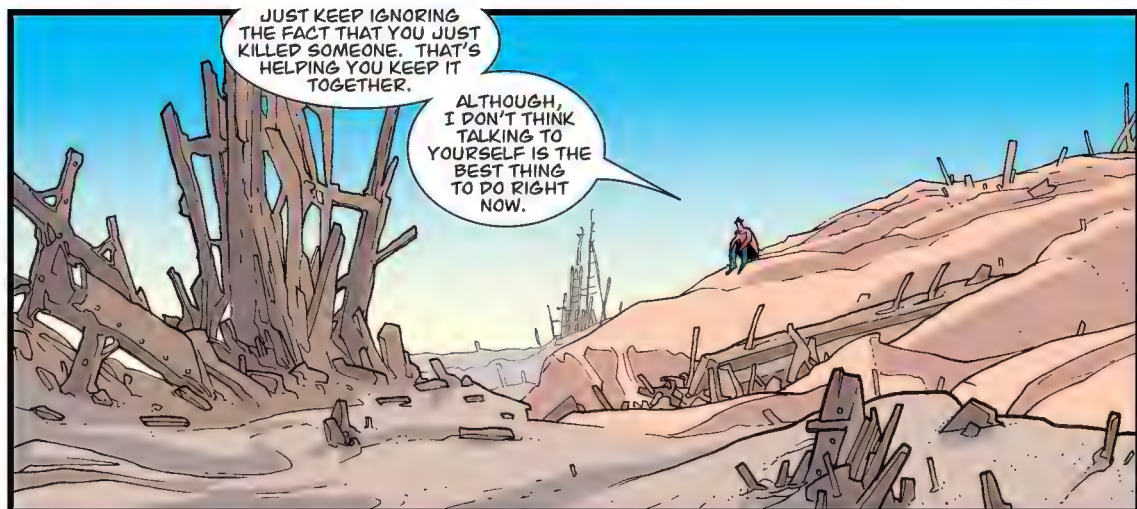
NOTHING.

AS FAR
AS THE EYE
CAN SEE...
NOTHING.

~SIGH~

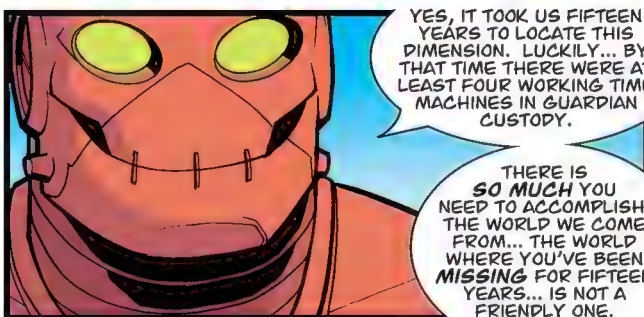
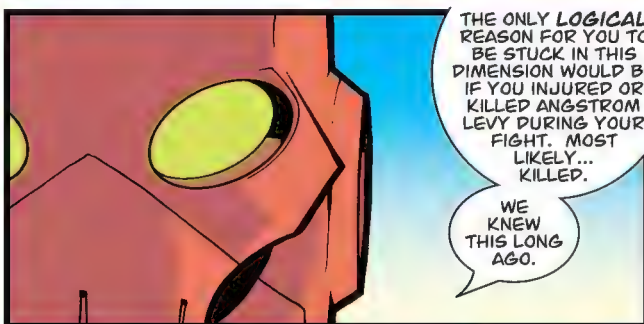
YOU'VE
REALLY
DONE IT THIS
TIME, MARK
GRAYSON.

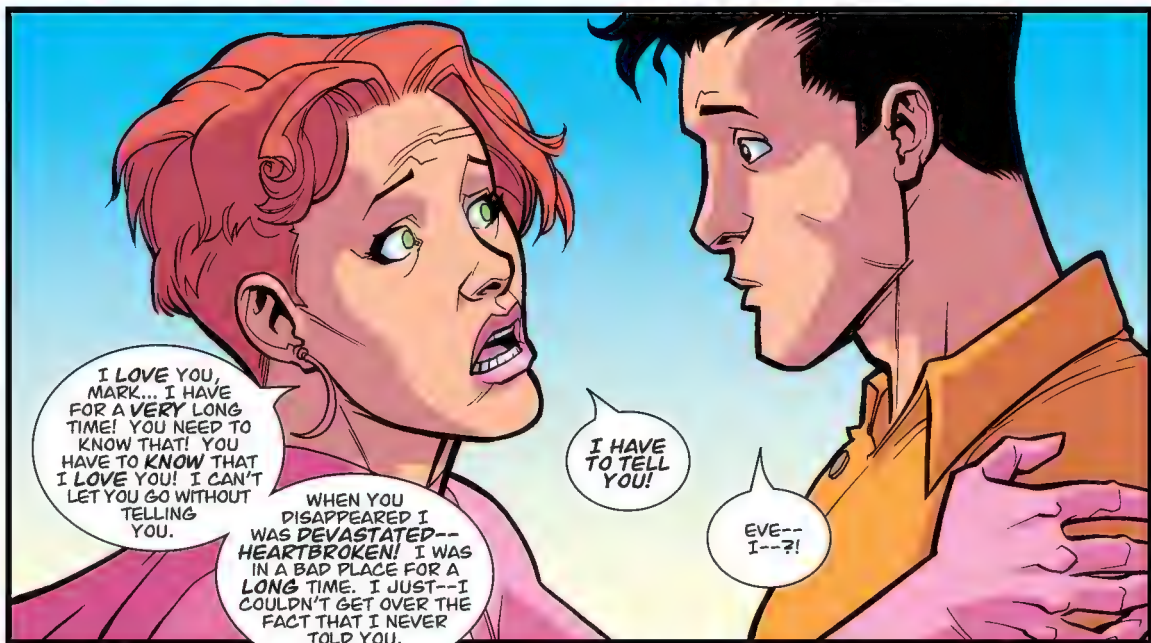
YOU'RE
SCREWED.

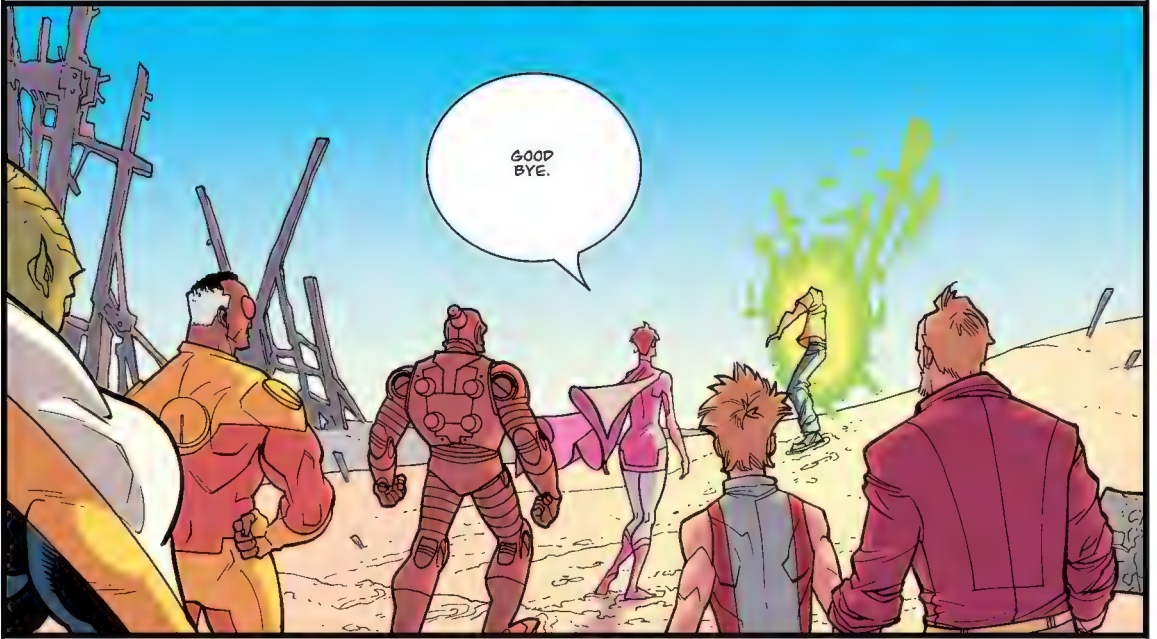
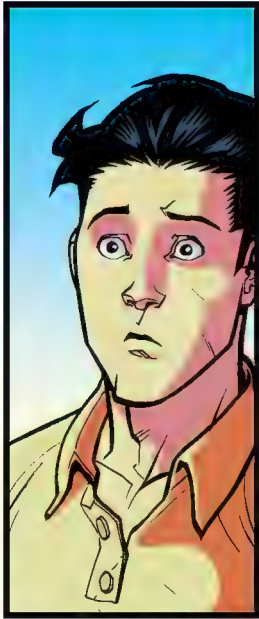
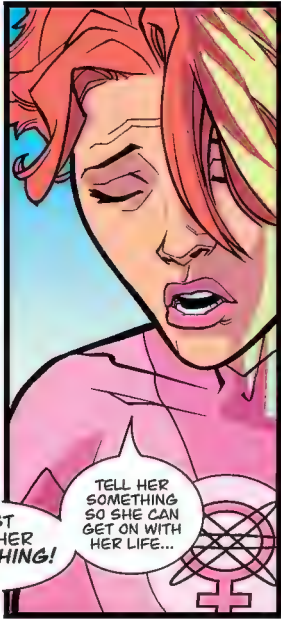


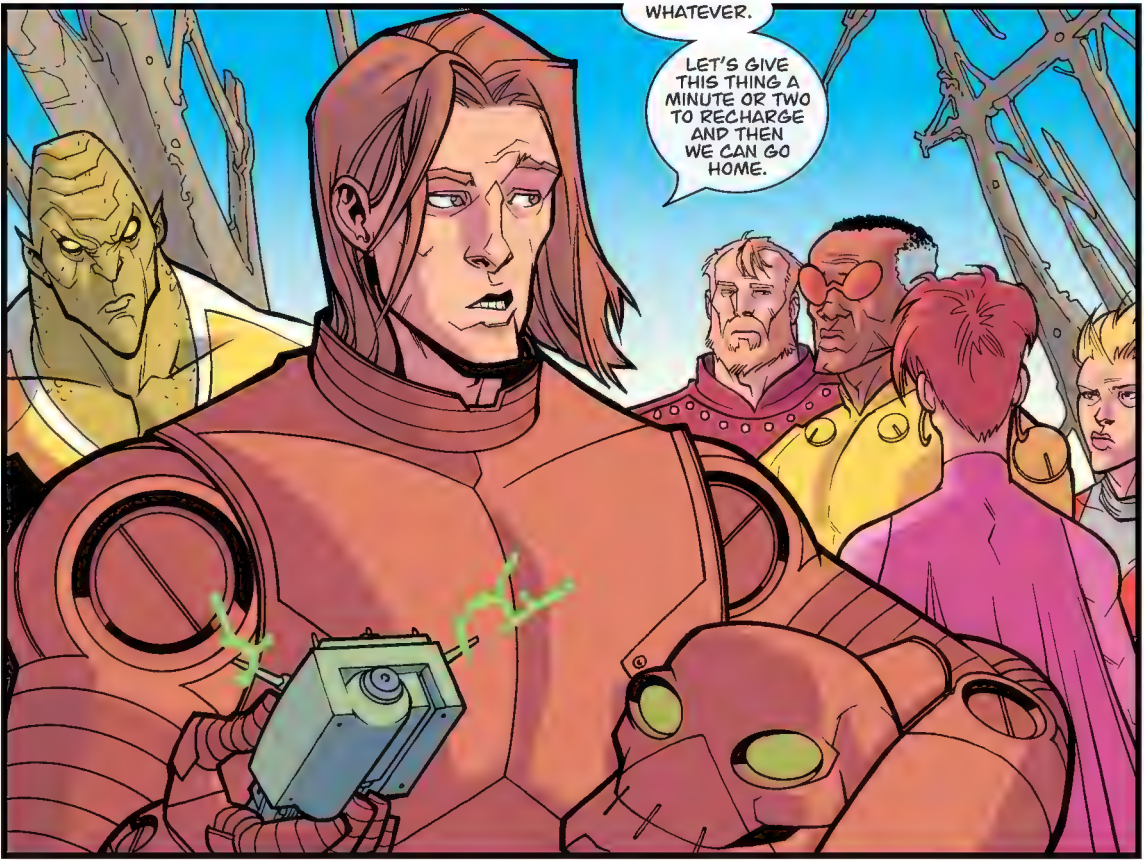


WHOA!







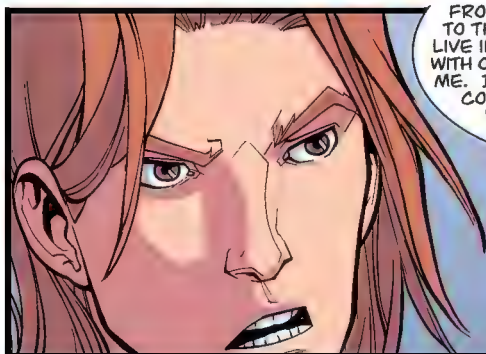
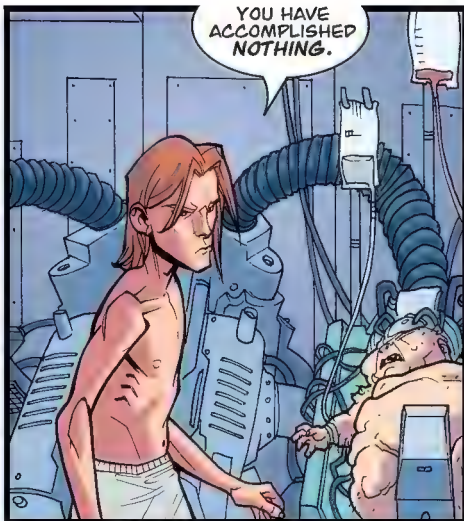


WHAT NOW, SHRIMP?
WISHING WE HAD CLONED
YOU A BIGGER, STRONGER
BODY ABOUT RIGHT
NOW, I'LL BET.

YOU GOT ANY MORE
SUPERHEROES ON
THE PAYROLL THAT
YOU'D LIKE US
TO KILL?



YOU HAVE
ACCOMPLISHED
NOTHING.



FROM BIRTH I WAS CONFINED
TO THAT CHAMBER--UNABLE TO
LIVE IN THE OPEN AIR. I WAS LEFT
WITH ONLY MY INTELLECT TO OCCUPY
ME. I WAS TOO HIDEOUS TO HAVE
CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE
WORLD--SO I DEVISED
ANOTHER WAY.

A DRONE--
AN AUTOMATION
THROUGH WHICH I
COULD LIVE MY LIFE--
AS SOMEONE--
SOMETHING ELSE.
SOMETHING FREE TO
MOVE ABOUT THE WORLD
AS IF I WAS NORMAL.
FOR A TIME, THAT
WAS ENOUGH.

THEN I
WANTED **MORE**. I
WANTED TO BE HUMAN.
I CLONED THIS BODY--
ACQUIRED YOUR AID IN
PLACING MY
CONSCIOUSNESS IN
IT. SO MAKE NO
MISTAKE...

YOU HAVE
NOT KILLED
ROBOT. YOU
FOOLS.

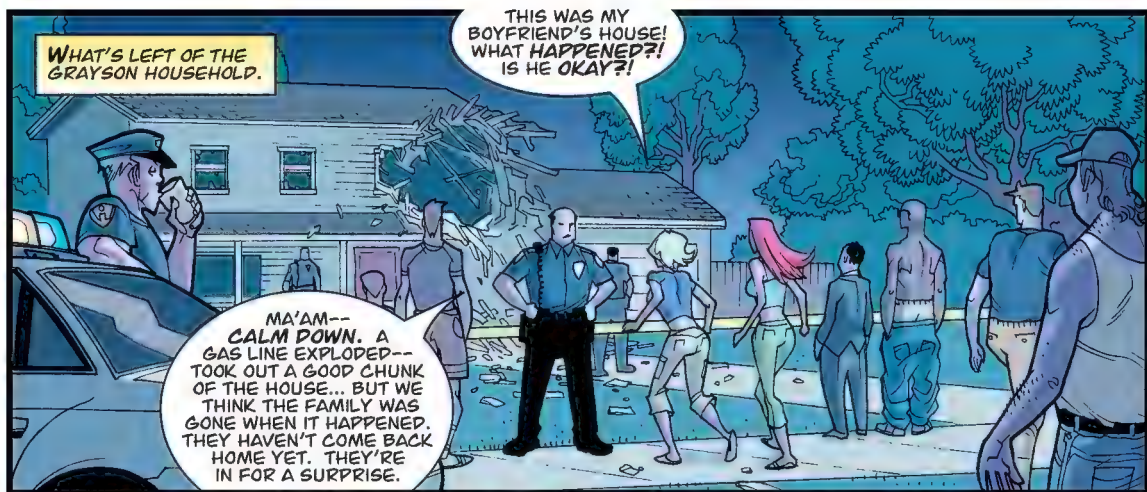
I AM
ROBOT.



AND
THAT WAS
FAR FROM MY
ONLY AUTOMATION
WITH WHICH TO
FIGHT YOU.

CRAP.

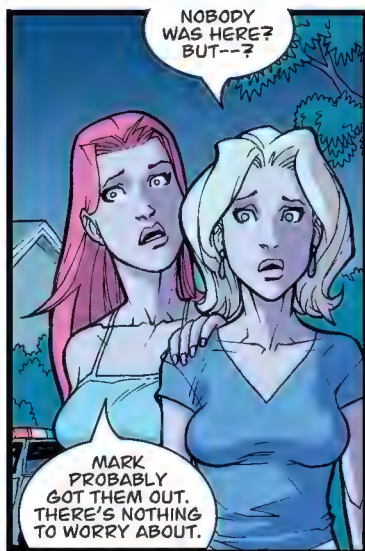




WHAT'S LEFT OF THE GRAYSON HOUSEHOLD.

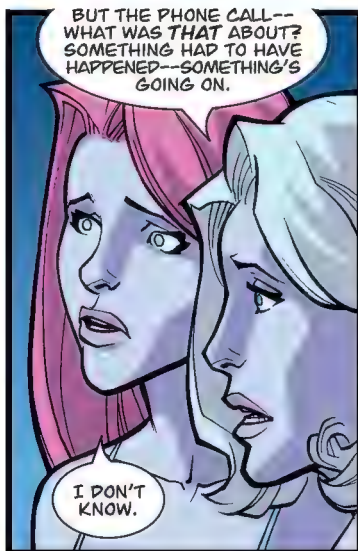
THIS WAS MY BOYFRIEND'S HOUSE! WHAT HAPPENED?! IS HE OKAY?!

MA'AM-- CALM DOWN. A GAS LINE EXPLODED-- TOOK OUT A GOOD CHUNK OF THE HOUSE... BUT WE THINK THE FAMILY WAS GONE WHEN IT HAPPENED. THEY HAVEN'T COME BACK HOME YET. THEY'RE IN FOR A SURPRISE.



NOBODY WAS HERE? BUT--?

MARK PROBABLY GOT THEM OUT. THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

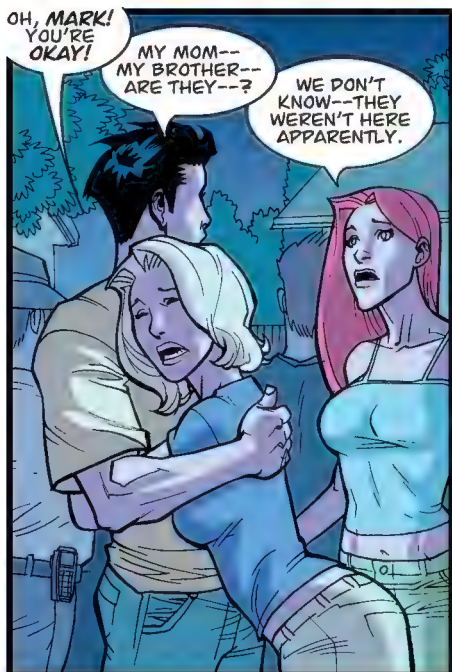


BUT THE PHONE CALL-- WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT? SOMETHING HAD TO HAVE HAPPENED--SOMETHING'S GOING ON.

I DON'T KNOW.



MY MOM-- MY BROTHER?! WHERE ARE THEY?!



OH, MARK! YOU'RE OKAY!

MY MOM-- MY BROTHER-- ARE THEY--?

WE DON'T KNOW--THEY WEREN'T HERE APPARENTLY.



THEY WERE HERE. WHAT--?

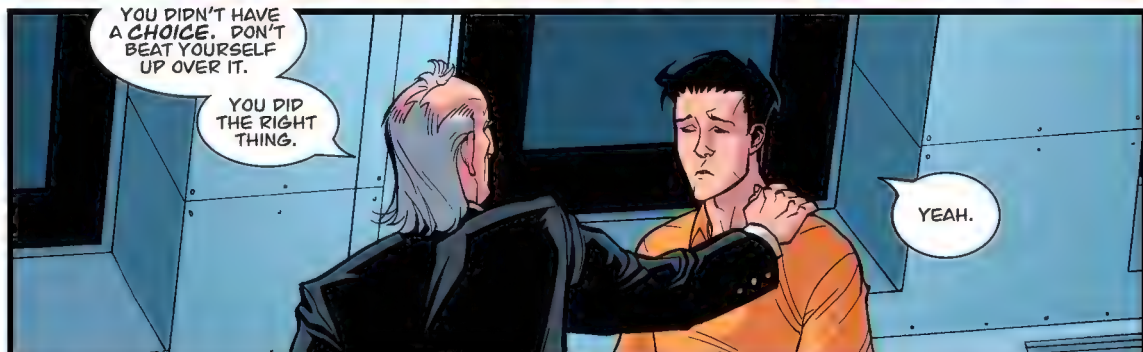
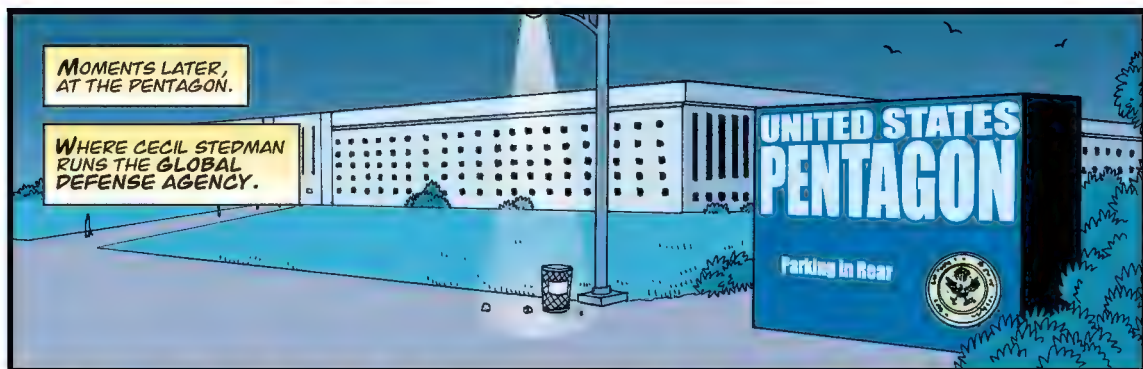
THEY'RE AT THE PENTAGON, KID. WE'RE WAITING FOR YOU.

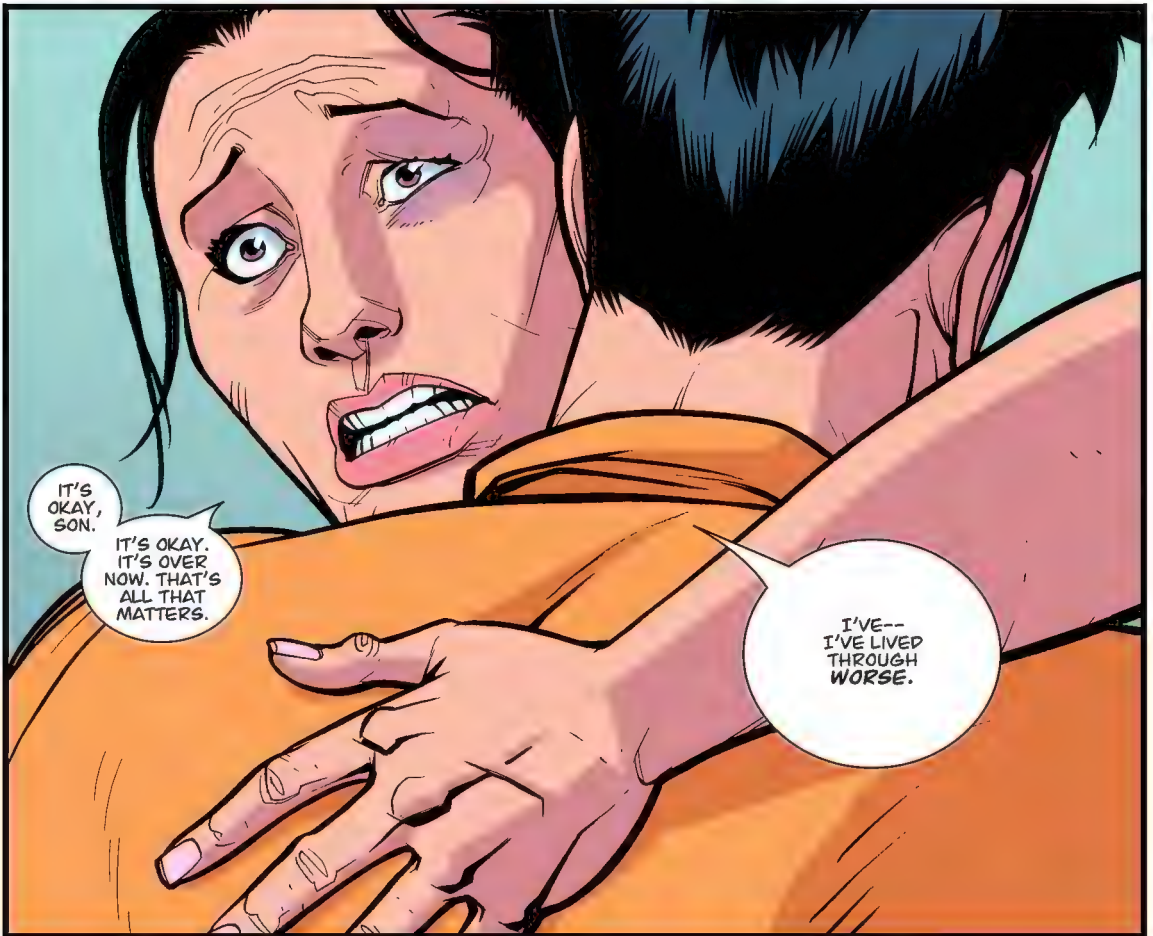
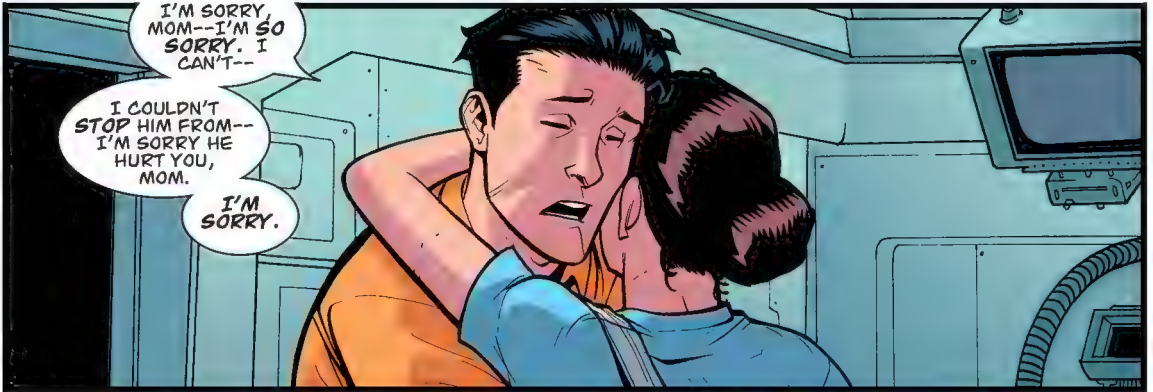
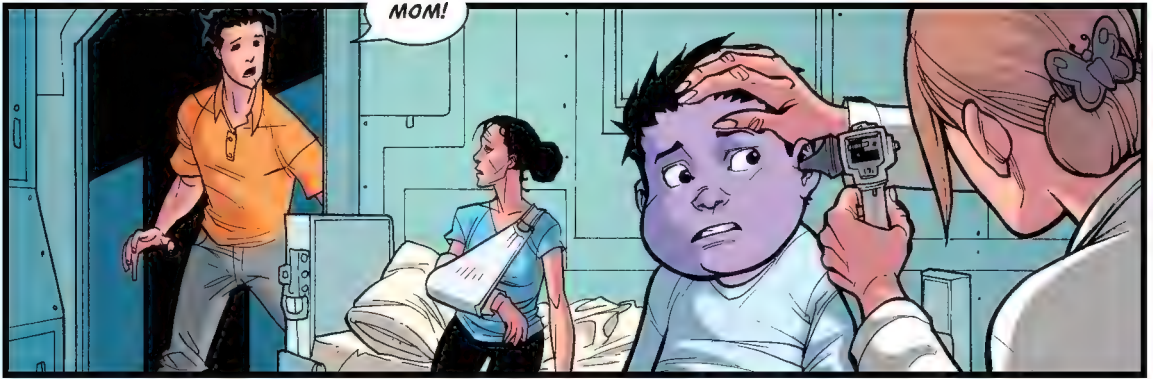


I GOTTA GO.

BUT MARK--!

I'LL CALL YOU AS SOON AS I CAN, AMBER. I GOTTA GO!





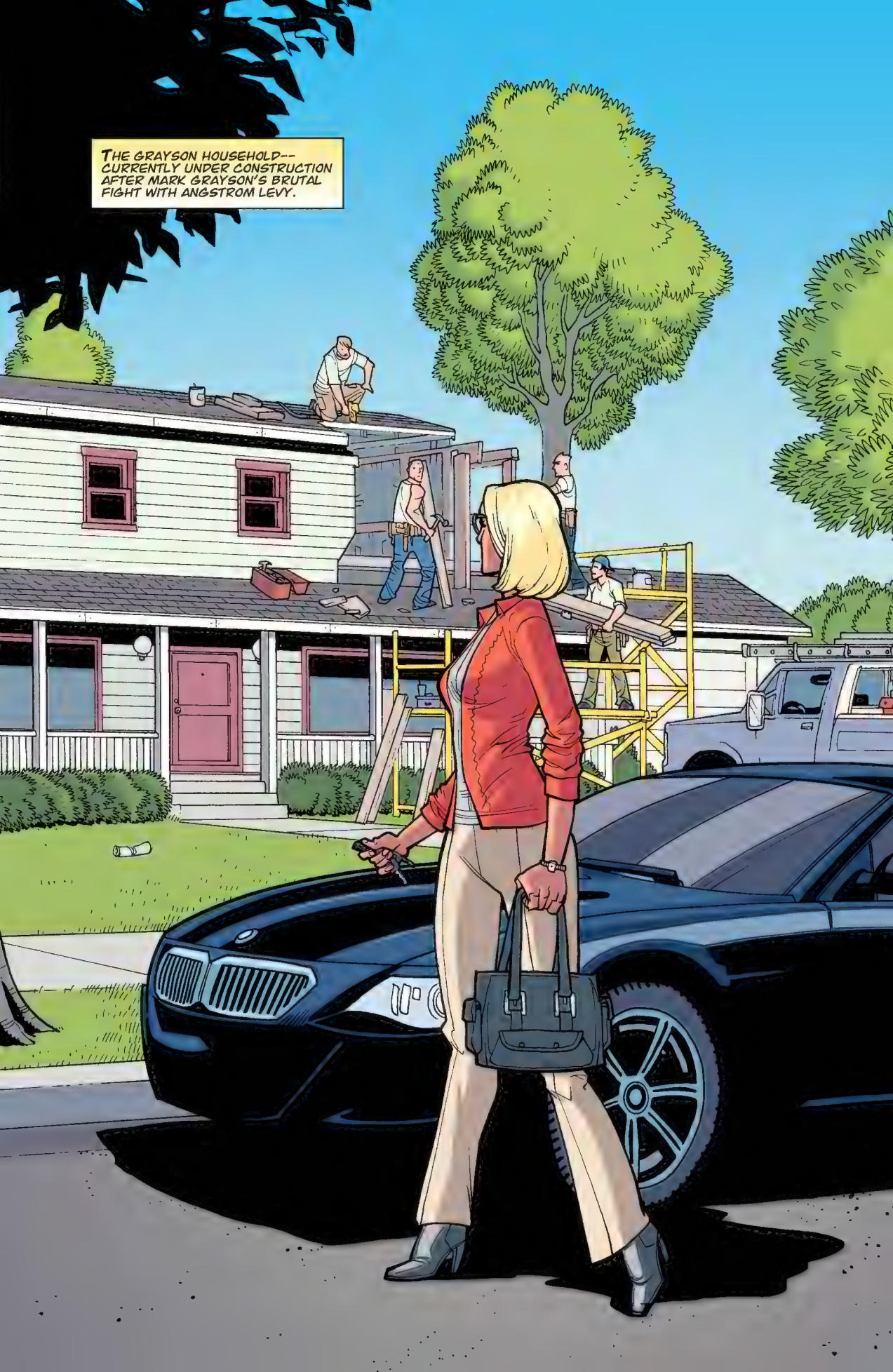


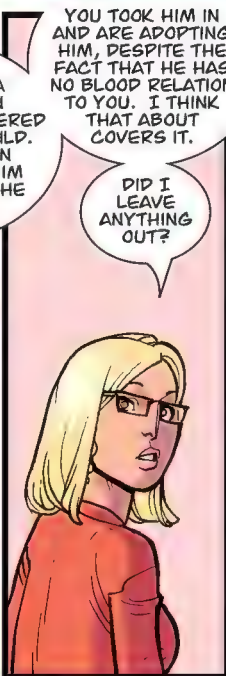
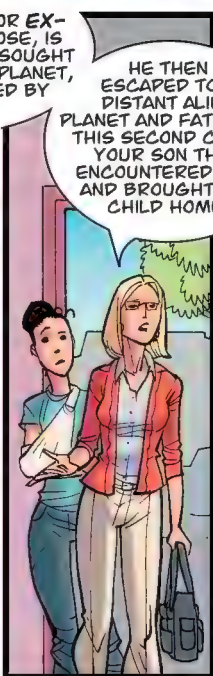
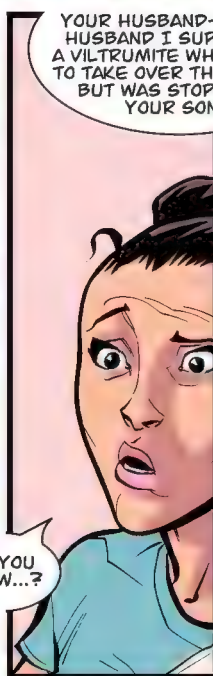
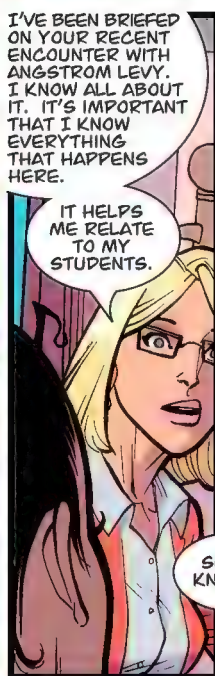
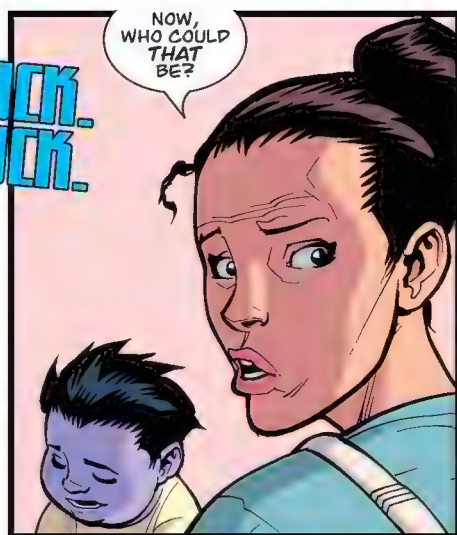
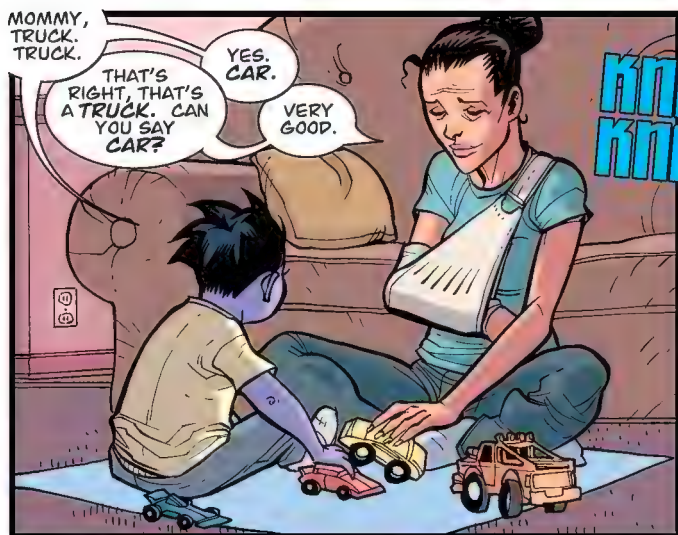


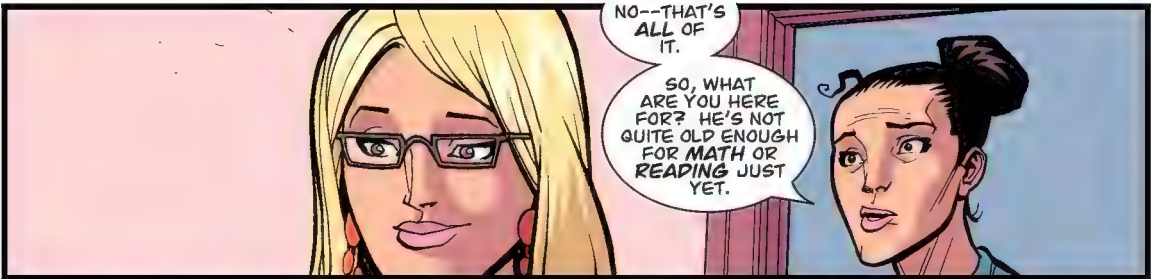
CHAPTER FIVE



THE GRAYSON HOUSEHOLD--
CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION
AFTER MARK GRAYSON'S BRUTAL
FIGHT WITH ANGSTROM LEVY.

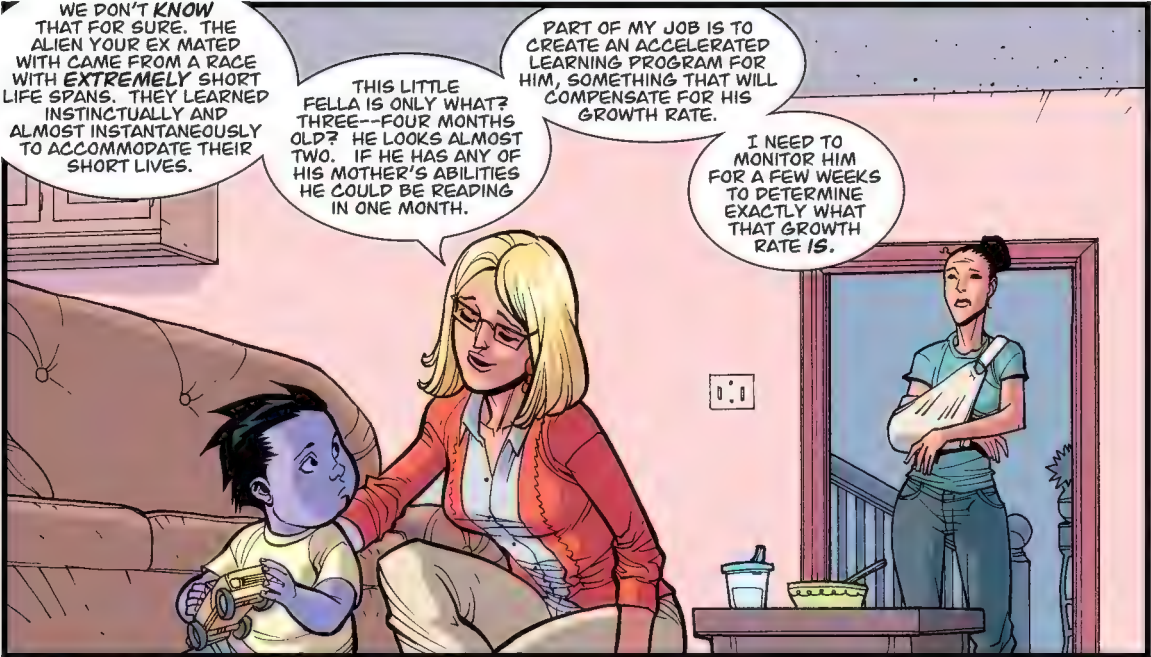






NO--THAT'S ALL OF IT.

SO, WHAT ARE YOU HERE FOR? HE'S NOT QUITE OLD ENOUGH FOR MATH OR READING JUST YET.



WE DON'T KNOW THAT FOR SURE. THE ALIEN YOUR EX MATED WITH CAME FROM A RACE WITH **EXTREMELY** SHORT LIFE SPANS. THEY LEARNED INSTINCTUALLY AND ALMOST INSTANTANEOUSLY TO ACCOMMODATE THEIR SHORT LIVES.

THIS LITTLE FELLA IS ONLY WHAT? THREE--FOUR MONTHS OLD? HE LOOKS ALMOST TWO. IF HE HAS ANY OF HIS MOTHER'S ABILITIES HE COULD BE READING IN ONE MONTH.

PART OF MY JOB IS TO CREATE AN ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAM FOR HIM, SOMETHING THAT WILL COMPENSATE FOR HIS GROWTH RATE.

I NEED TO MONITOR HIM FOR A FEW WEEKS TO DETERMINE EXACTLY WHAT THAT GROWTH RATE IS.



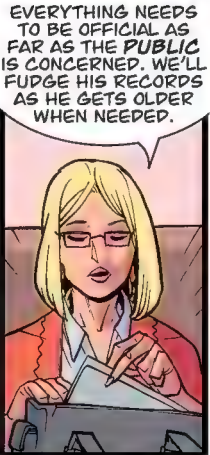
AND NONE OF THIS SEEMS **UNUSUAL** TO YOU?



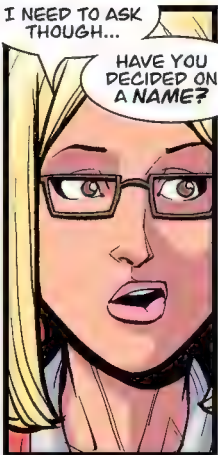
YOU THINK THIS IS MY **FIRST** TIME? I'VE BEEN TEACHING SUPER-HEROES' CHILDREN FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS. I'VE DEALT WITH SITUATIONS **MUCH** MORE UNUSUAL THAN THIS.



OH, AND WHILE I'M HERE CECIL HAS SOME PAPERS YOU NEED TO FILL OUT TO FINALIZE THE ADOPTION.

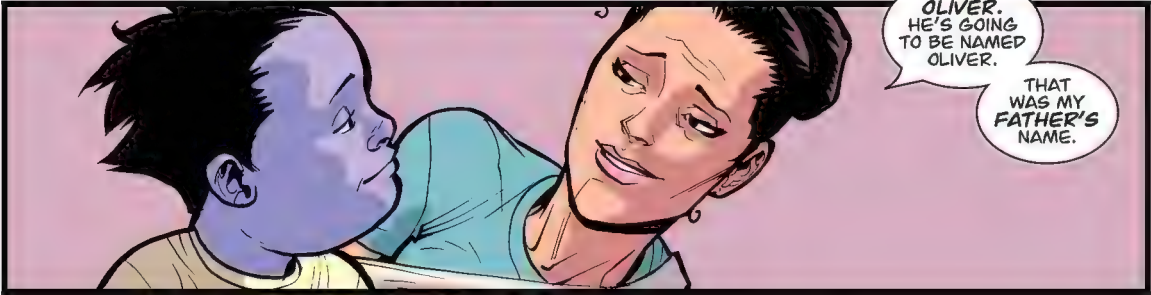


EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BE OFFICIAL AS FAR AS THE **PUBLIC** IS CONCERNED. WE'LL FUDGE HIS RECORDS AS HE GETS OLDER WHEN NEEDED.



I NEED TO ASK THOUGH...

HAVE YOU DECIDED ON A NAME?



OLIVER. HE'S GOING TO BE NAMED OLIVER.

THAT WAS MY FATHER'S NAME.



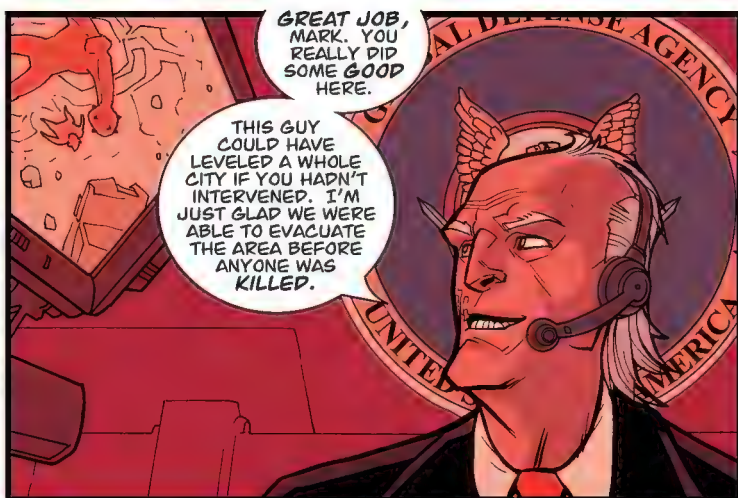
!!!HOKPOOT!!!

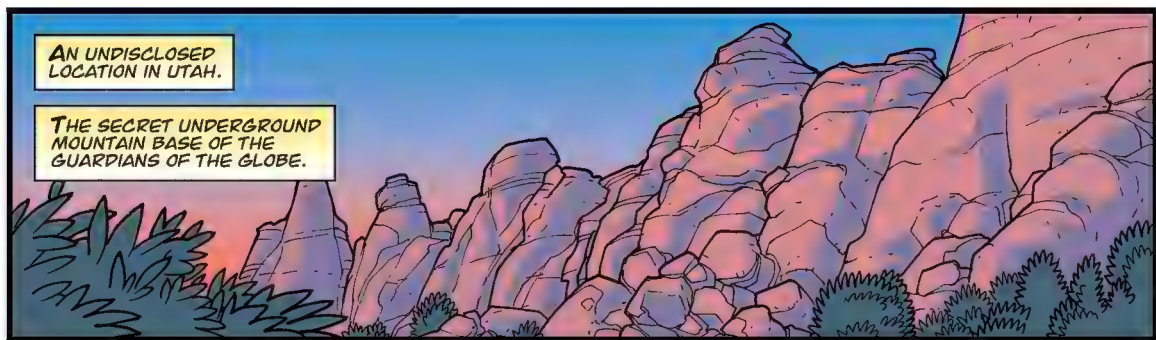
AS MUCH
TROUBLE AS
YOU'VE BEEN,
I GOTTA
ADMIT...

...RAMPAGE.

THAT'S
JUST A COOL
NAME.

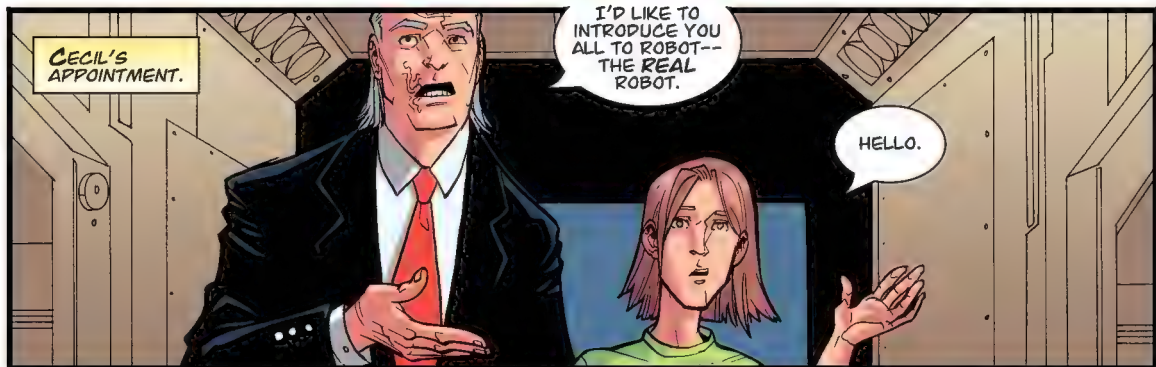
SOFA KING
LOW PRICES!





AN UNDISCLOSED
LOCATION IN UTAH.

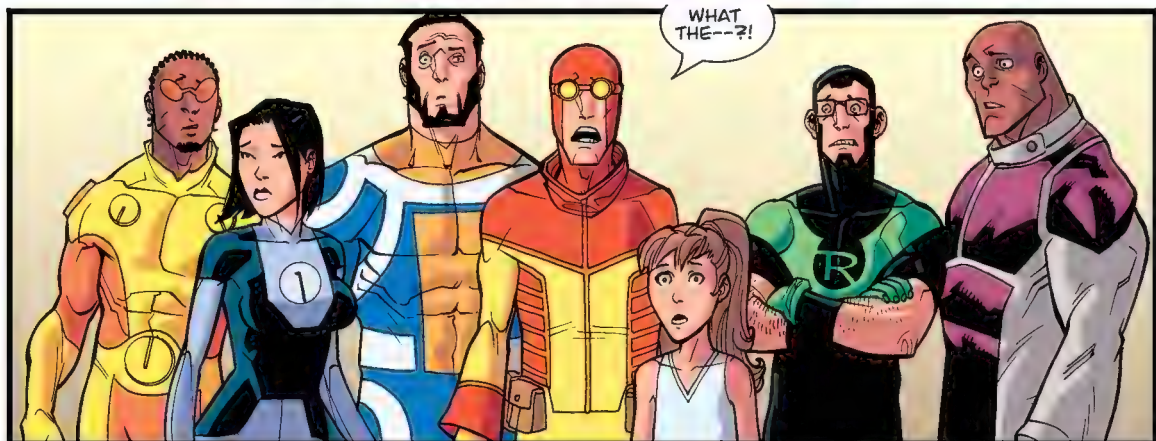
THE SECRET UNDERGROUND
MOUNTAIN BASE OF THE
GUARDIANS OF THE GLOBE.



CECIL'S
APPOINTMENT.

I'D LIKE TO
INTRODUCE YOU
ALL TO ROBOT--
THE REAL
ROBOT.

HELLO.



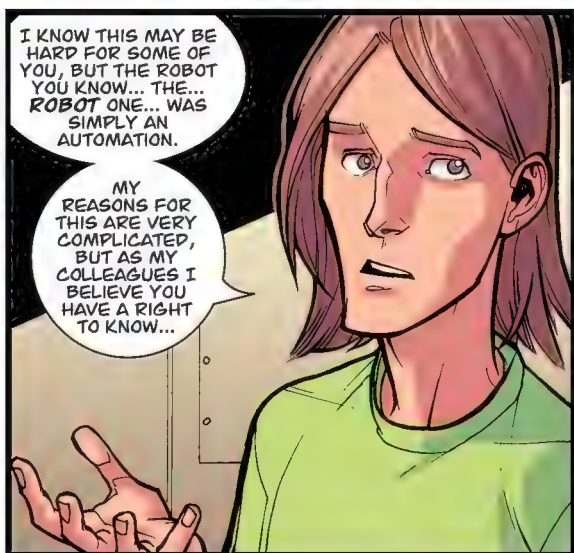
WHAT
THE--?!



I KNOW THIS IS GOING TO BE
A LITTLE HARD TO BELIEVE.
WE HAVE RUN SOME TESTS...
THIS IS LEGIT. REX, I KNOW
THIS WILL PROBABLY BE THE
MOST SHOCKING FOR YOU...
AS THIS IS ALSO A CLONED
VERSION OF YOUR BODY...
BUT PLEASE, HEAR
HIM OUT.

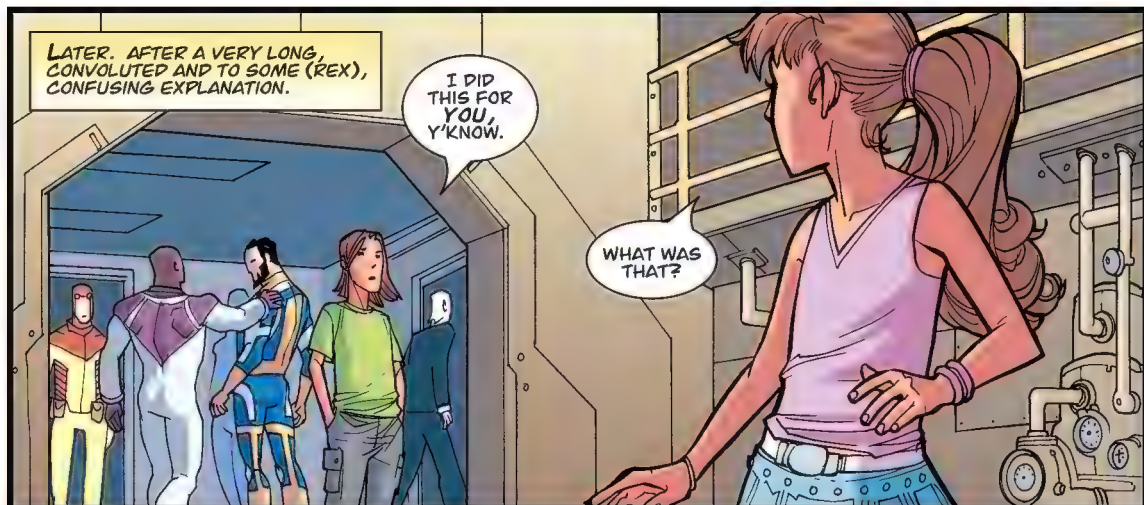
ROBOT,
IF YOU
WOULD.

OKAY.

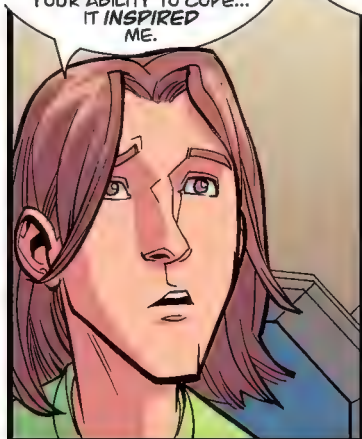


I KNOW THIS MAY BE
HARD FOR SOME OF
YOU, BUT THE ROBOT
YOU KNOW... THE...
ROBOT ONE... WAS
SIMPLY AN
AUTOMATION.

MY
REASONS FOR
THIS ARE VERY
COMPLICATED,
BUT AS MY
COLLEAGUES I
BELIEVE YOU
HAVE A RIGHT
TO KNOW...



WHILE TRYING TO FIND A CURE FOR YOUR CONDITION... I BECAME ENAMORED WITH YOUR PLIGHT, WHICH MIRRORED MINE. IN GETTING TO KNOW YOU, I WAS FASCINATED BY YOUR ABILITY TO COPE... IT INSPIRED ME.

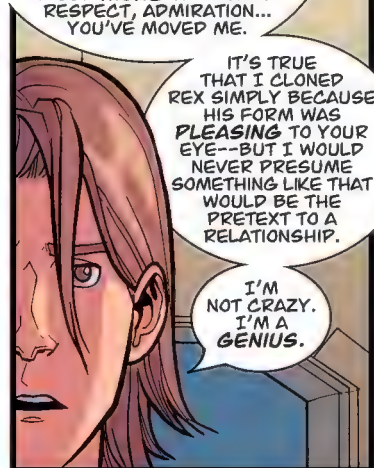


FOR SO LONG I HAD BEEN CONTENT TO LIVE LIFE THROUGH THOSE MECHANICAL EYES-- NEVER LONGING FOR ANYTHING MORE, UNTIL I MET YOU.



YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TELL ME YOU LOVE ME, RIGHT? I MEAN, THAT WOULD BE TOTALLY CREEPY.

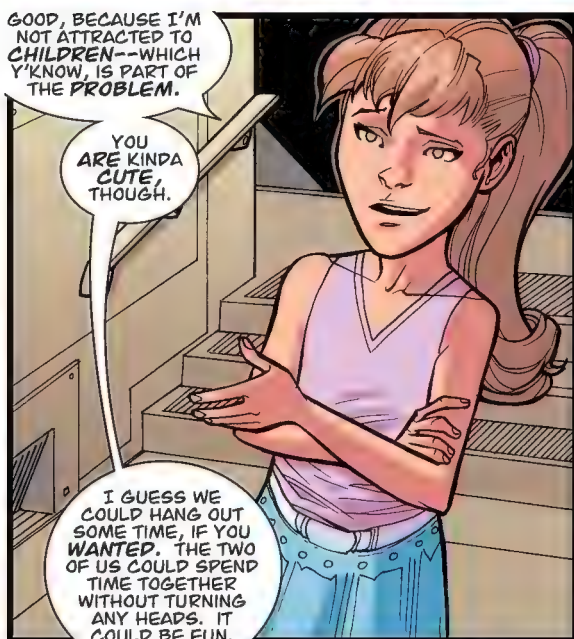
NO, I BARELY KNOW YOU-- THAT WOULD BE MORONIC AND I'M ONE OF THE SMARTEST PEOPLE ON THE PLANET. MY FEELINGS FOR YOU ARE SO MUCH MORE THAN THAT. RESPECT, ADMIRATION... YOU'VE MOVED ME.



IT'S TRUE THAT I CLONED REX SIMPLY BECAUSE HIS FORM WAS PLEASING TO YOUR EYE--BUT I WOULD NEVER PRESUME SOMETHING LIKE THAT WOULD BE THE PRETEXT TO A RELATIONSHIP.

I'M NOT CRAZY. I'M A GENIUS.

GOOD, BECAUSE I'M NOT ATTRACTED TO CHILDREN--WHICH Y'KNOW, IS PART OF THE PROBLEM.



YOU ARE KINDA CUTE, THOUGH.

I GUESS WE COULD HANG OUT SOME TIME, IF YOU WANTED. THE TWO OF US COULD SPEND TIME TOGETHER WITHOUT TURNING ANY HEADS. IT COULD BE FUN.



IT'S NOT LIKE I HAVE ANY FRIENDS OR ANYTHING.

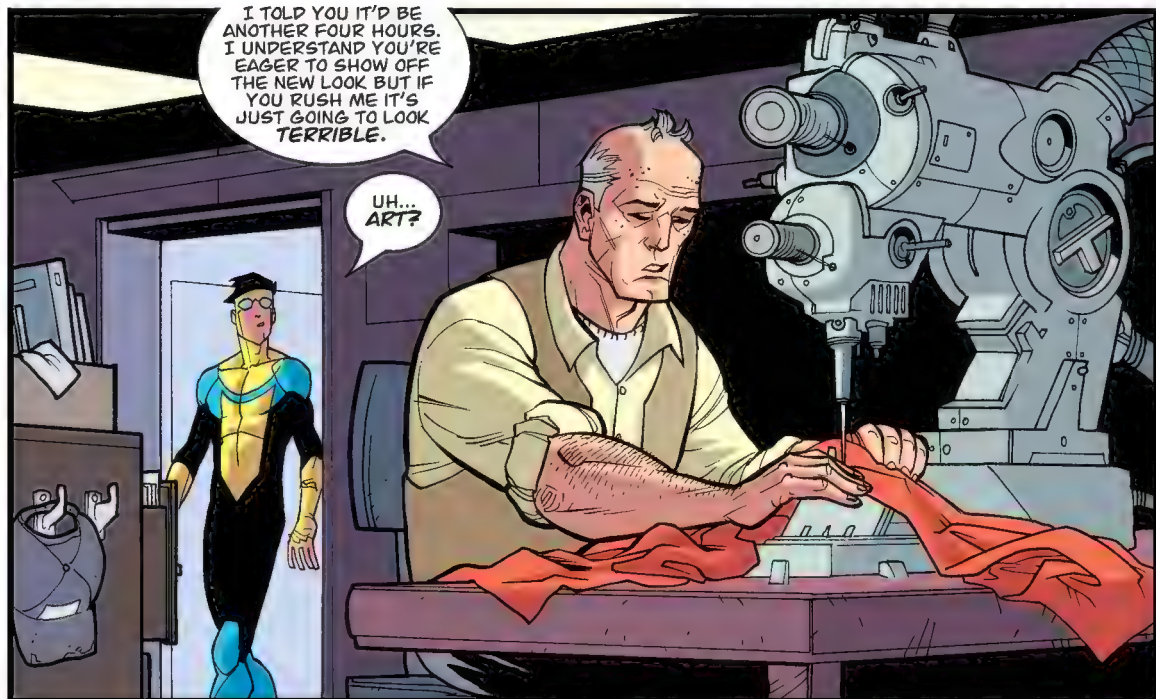
SOUNDS GOOD.

PHASE TWO IS UNDERWAY...



THE UNASSUMING TAILOR SHOP OF ARTHUR ROSENBAUM.

UNBEKNOWNST TO HIS CUSTOMERS, THE BULK OF ART'S INCOME IS GENERATED BY DESIGNING AND CREATING COSTUMES FOR SUPERHEROES.

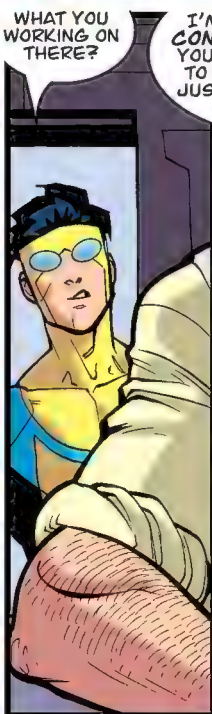


I TOLD YOU IT'D BE ANOTHER FOUR HOURS. I UNDERSTAND YOU'RE EAGER TO SHOW OFF THE NEW LOOK BUT IF YOU RUSH ME IT'S JUST GOING TO LOOK TERRIBLE.

UH... ART?



OH, HEY, MARK... I THOUGHT YOU WERE SOMEONE ELSE.



WHAT YOU WORKING ON THERE?



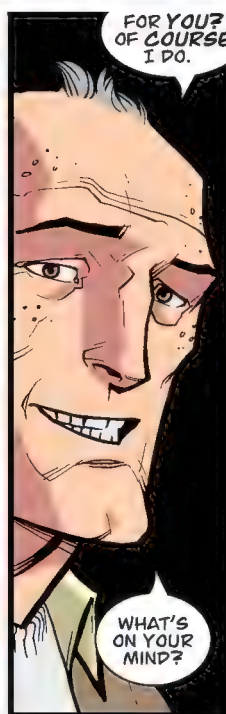
I'M AFRAID THAT'S CONFIDENTIAL, SON. YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT TO SEE IT IN ACTION JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.

THIS CLIENT IS VERY PARTICULAR.



I SUPPOSE I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT.

DO YOU HAVE TIME TO TALK?



FOR YOU? OF COURSE I DO.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

A BUNCH OF STUFF. STUFF I CAN'T TALK TO MY MOM ABOUT... AND MY FRIEND WILLIAM IS BEING A JERK RIGHT NOW... SO YOU GOT NOMINATED.

GOOD TO KNOW I'M THIRD.

UH... YEAH. SO I REALLY DON'T HAVE ANYONE ELSE I COULD TALK TO. I'D REALLY APPRECIATE IT.

IT'S GIRL STUFF.

MY SPECIALTY.

LAY IT ON ME.

WELL, THERE ARE THESE TWO GIRLS...

AMBER, MY GIRLFRIEND.

AND EVE, MY FRIEND, AND FELLOW SUPERHERO.

WHOA, THERE! TREAD CAREFULLY FROM HERE ON OUT. CERTAIN DETAILS COULD BE HAZARDOUS TO MY AGING HEART.

SHE CAN ONLY BEAT SO FAST, Y'KNOW.

UH... I DON'T HAVE DETAILS LIKE THAT. IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT... REALLY.

IT'S JUST... THEY BOTH KINDA LIKE ME, Y'KNOW... IN THAT WAY.

I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU HAD GIRL PROBLEMS.

I DON'T HEAR THE PROBLEM. YOU JUST NEED TO PICK ONE AND MOVE ON.

HOW IS IT NOT THAT SIMPLE?

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.

WELL, THAT IS A PROBLEM.

I KINDA LIKE THEM BOTH.

I TOLD YOU.

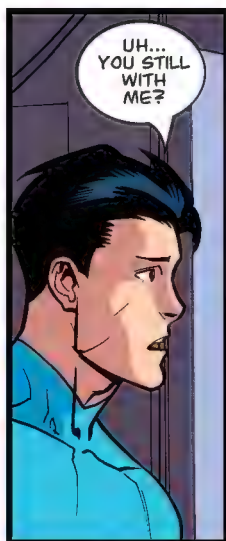
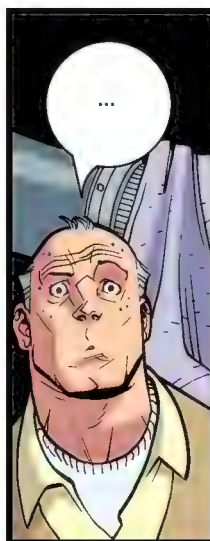
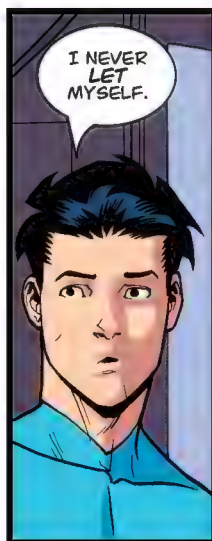
I'VE KNOWN EVE LONGER,
BUT SHE'S ALWAYS JUST
BEEN A FRIEND. I NEVER
REALLY LOOKED AT HER
THAT WAY.

MOSTLY
BECAUSE SHE
OUTRIGHT TOLD
ME NOT TO. SHE
WAS DATING REX
SPOLOE WHEN
WE MET.

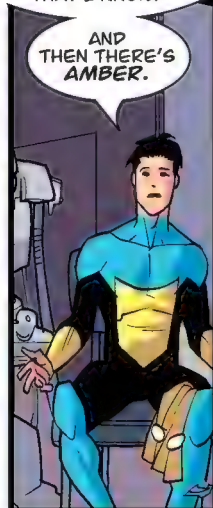
I DID REX'S
COSTUME.

THAT'S NICE.
ANYWAY...SHE WAS
ALWAYS UNAVAILABLE
TO ME--FIRST BECAUSE
SHE WAS WITH REX AND
LATER BECAUSE I WAS
WITH AMBER.

SO I
NEVER REALLY
THOUGHT OF
HER THAT
WAY.



SO THAT'S THE THING... I
KNOW EVE LIKES ME...
APPARENTLY A LOT... BUT
SHE DOESN'T KNOW
THAT I KNOW.





BUT THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT... IT IS... BUT IT *ISN'T*. NOT TO ME. I MEAN IT DOESN'T HURT... BUT...

AMBER ASKED ME OUT. I WAS INSECURE, I STILL AM... A LITTLE. I HADN'T REALLY BEEN ON ANY DATES. I DIDN'T THINK GIRLS WERE INTERESTED IN ME.

THEN AMBER CAME ALONG. SHE LIKED ME. SHE MADE THE FIRST MOVE. THAT WAS SOMETHING. IT MADE ME FEEL GOOD.

HER BEING TOTALLY HOT DIDN'T HURT--BUT MAINLY--IT'S THAT SHE MAKES ME FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF.

BUT IT'S NOT LIKE THAT'S ALL I LIKED ABOUT HER. I DIDN'T LIKE HER JUST BECAUSE SHE LIKED ME. SHE'S GREAT.

AMBER AND I REALLY GET ALONG.

BUT SHE'S NOT A SUPERHERO?

NO, SHE'S NOT.

BUT IS THAT SUCH A BIG DEAL? I DON'T KNOW. I MEAN, MY IDENTITY IS *SECRET*--FOR THE MOST PART. MY TWO LIVES ARE VERY SEPARATE.

I DON'T THINK I'M GOING TO GET HER HURT.

HECK, I EVEN SAVED HER ONCE WHEN SHE *WOULD* HAVE BEEN HURT IF I HADN'T BEEN THERE.

I DON'T KNOW...



PART OF ME THINKS IT'S JUST NOT FAIR TO BE WITH AMBER. NOT FAIR TO HER. SHE'S IN COLLEGE, SHE'S STILL YOUNG, SHE'S GOT HER WHOLE LIFE AHEAD OF HER.

SHE DIDN'T KNOW I WAS A SUPERHERO WHEN WE GOT TOGETHER. SHE JUST LIKED ME, MARK GRAYSON. THEN I SPRING IT ON HER... I'M INVINCIBLE.

NOW SHE GETS TO SIT AROUND FOR A MONTH WHILE I'M ON ANOTHER PLANET. SHE GETS TO WATCH ME GET THE *SNOT* BEATEN OUT OF ME ON TV. SHE GETS TO HAVE ME RUN OFF IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR DATES--IF I EVEN BOTHER TO SHOW UP AT ALL.

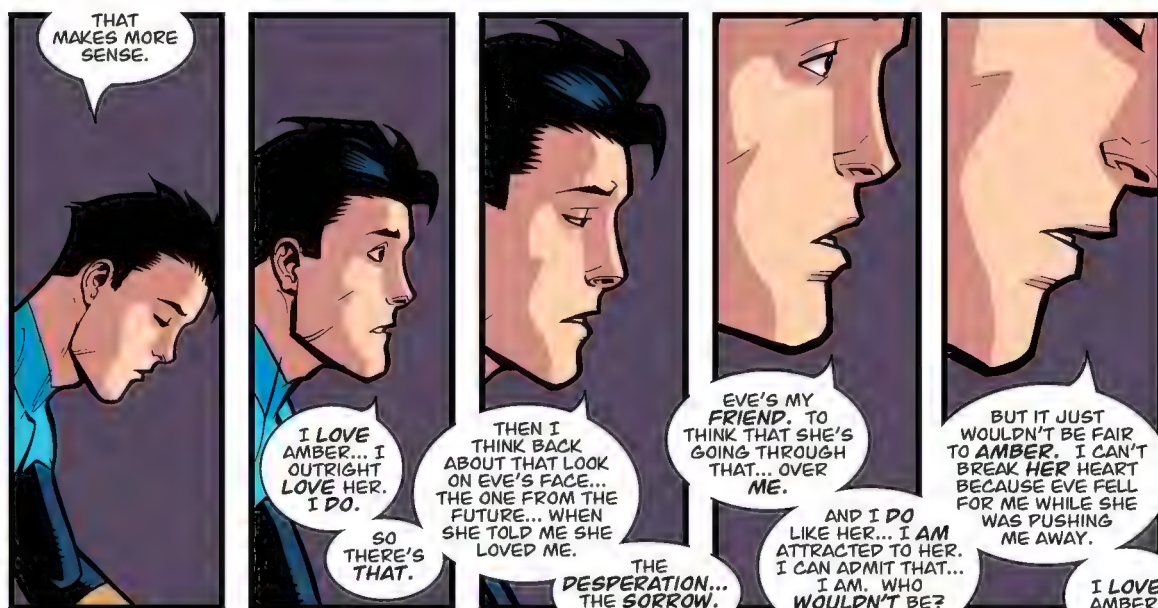
DOES THAT SEEM FAIR?



THAT'S REALLY UP TO HER, MARK. SHE DIDN'T KNOW BEFORE BUT SHE KNOWS NOW AND SHE'S STILL WITH YOU.

BUT YOU JUST DON'T BREAK UP WITH A GIRL BECAUSE YOU THINK SHE COULD DO BETTER. THAT SHOULD BE UP TO HER. LET HER MAKE THAT DECISION.

IF YOU LIKE EVE BETTER, IF YOU FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO HER, IF YOU'LL BE HAPPIER WITH HER, THAT'S ONE THING.



THAT MAKES MORE SENSE.

I LOVE AMBER... I OUTRIGHT LOVE HER. I DO.

SO THERE'S THAT.

THEN I THINK BACK ABOUT THAT LOOK ON EVE'S FACE... THE ONE FROM THE FUTURE... WHEN SHE TOLD ME SHE LOVED ME.

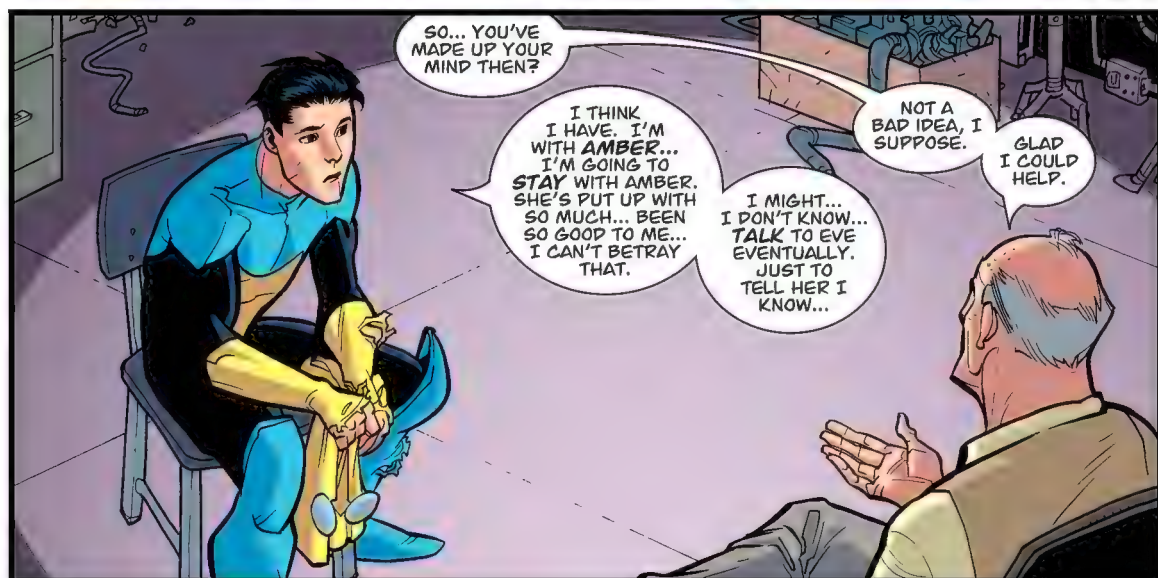
THE DESPERATION... THE SORROW.

EVE'S MY FRIEND. TO THINK THAT SHE'S GOING THROUGH THAT... OVER ME.

AND I DO LIKE HER... I AM ATTRACTED TO HER. I CAN ADMIT THAT... I AM. WHO WOULDN'T BE?

BUT IT JUST WOULDN'T BE FAIR TO AMBER. I CAN'T BREAK HER HEART BECAUSE EVE FELL FOR ME WHILE SHE WAS PUSHING ME AWAY.

I LOVE AMBER.



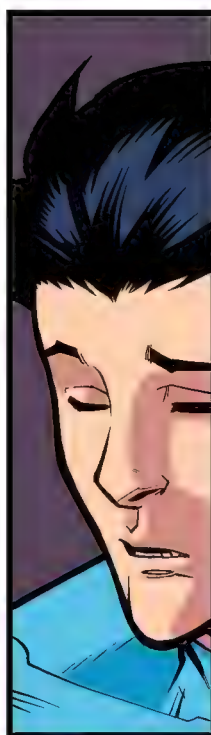
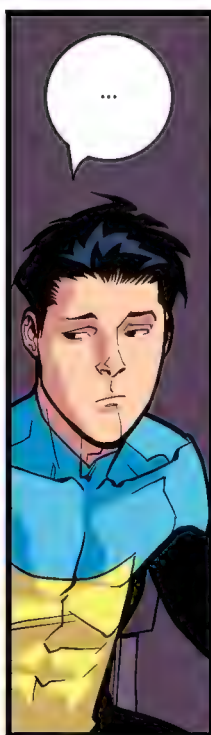
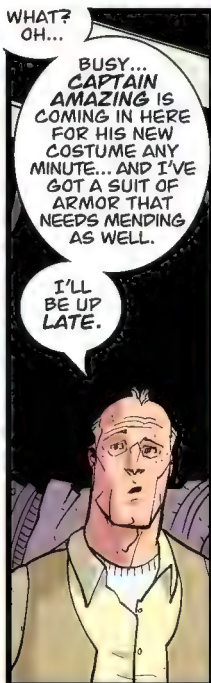
SO... YOU'VE MADE UP YOUR MIND THEN?

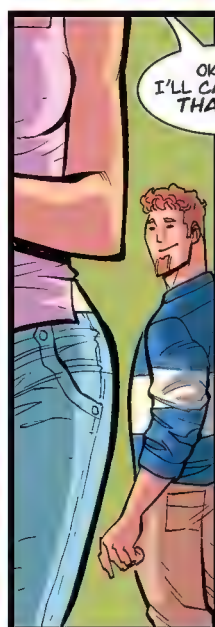
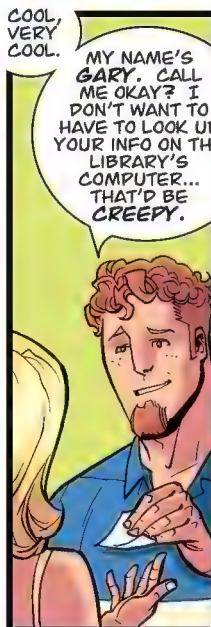
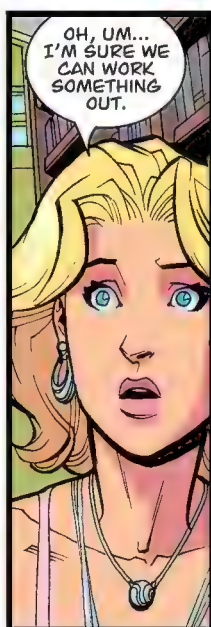
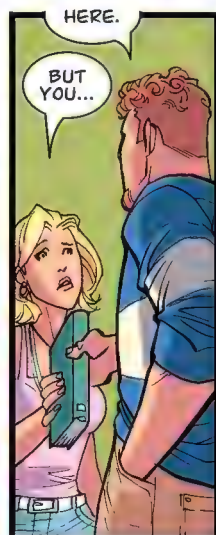
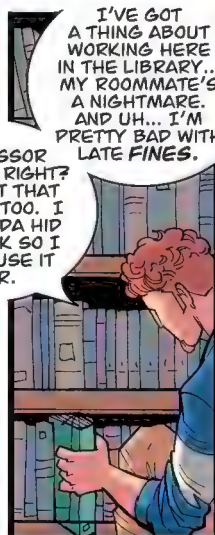
I THINK I HAVE. I'M WITH AMBER... I'M GOING TO STAY WITH AMBER. SHE'S PUT UP WITH SO MUCH... BEEN SO GOOD TO ME... I CAN'T BETRAY THAT.

I MIGHT... I DON'T KNOW... TALK TO EVE EVENTUALLY. JUST TO TELL HER I KNOW...

NOT A BAD IDEA, I SUPPOSE.

GLAD I COULD HELP.







YOUR MOTHER TELLS ME... YOU SAW YOUR FATHER...

YEAH, ON THAT PLANET I WENT TO. SHE TOLD YOU ABOUT MY LITTLE BROTHER THEN?

SHE TOLD ME ABOUT ALL OF IT. EVERYTHING YOU TOLD HER AT LEAST. YOU HOLD ANYTHING BACK?

THE ALIEN QUEEN... MY FATHER'S NEW... WIFE OR WHATEVER. SHE WAS REALLY NICE. I ACTUALLY LIKED HER. I DIDN'T TELL MY MOM THAT.

I GOTTA SAY, HEARING ABOUT YOUR FATHER... IT MADE ME SO... I DON'T KNOW... RELIEVED. HE WAS SO KIND TO ME... A GOOD FRIEND.

WHEN HE DID WHAT HE DID TO YOU-- I THOUGHT I'D LOST MY MIND.

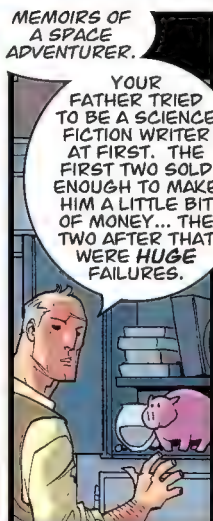
IT'S COMFORTING TO HEAR THERE'S STILL A PIECE OF HIM THAT I KNEW LEFT IN THERE.

IT WAS... GOOD FOR ME, TOO... SEEING HIM LIKE THAT. KNOWING THE FATHER I KNEW WASN'T A COMPLETE LIE.

THERE'S A THING I KINDA WANTED TO ASK YOU ABOUT. WHEN WE WERE DEFEATED-- WHEN THE VILTRUMITES TOOK HIM AWAY...

THE LAST THING HE SAID TO ME WAS...

"READ MY BOOKS."





how he obtained the weapon, or where it came from. The origins of the weapon are completely unknown to the empire. All that is known are its capabilities.

The information was gathered from thousands of sources. Sketchy eyewitness accounts, damaged artifacts--evidence of the weapon's power--everything points to the same conclusion. This weapon--the infinity ray--emitted an energy wave that was unstoppable. It was said that blasts from this infinity ray still race through the cosmos, blasting a path through anything they encounter. Planets, Stars, Ships--anything in their path is destroyed. Again, this is only a theory. No one has ever gotten close enough to study the infinity ray for themselves. The Space Rider made sure of that.

Whether the story was true or not, I had my mission. I was to hunt down the Space Rider, determine whether or not the stories of his weapon were true and if so, arrest him. He was to stand trial for offenses against the empire. Were his weapon as powerful as it was fabled to be he was a huge threat. I left at once.

Little was known about the Space Rider, where he lived, what quadrant of space he operated in, all was a mystery. He had become the stuff of legend. Stories of him stretch across the twelve galaxies. He was said to be in two places at once. Stories were conflicting with each other. Finding him would be no easy task. Yet it was a task I had to complete. I dare not fail my people. I knew what was at stake. Our very way of life.

At first, I studied the stories for similarities, common elements. Anything that made it possible for me to tell fact from fiction--if there was any fact to these stories. In time I would find that the Space Rider and his weapon were very real--and as far fetched as they were, its capabilities were that of tall tales. But it would take me nearly fifteen years to discover this.

The first clue came when I was contacted by a former subordinate of The Space Rider who was willing to inform me of his possible whereabouts. With

WHAT WERE THESE BOOKS ABOUT?

OH, UH... SOME SPACE ALIEN DUDE IS HUNTING DOWN ENEMIES OF HIS GOVERNMENT OR SOMETHING. ELIMINATING THEM. EACH BOOK HAS HIM GOING AFTER ONE OR TWO THREATS TO THEIR EMPIRE OR SOMETHING.

IT WAS COOL STUFF.

YOU MEAN...IT'S ABOUT A GUY FROM AN ALIEN PLANET HUNTING DOWN ENEMIES OF HIS EMPIRE?

YEAH. YOU KNOW, I NEVER REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT IT, BUT I WONDER IF THESE WERE LIKE VILTRUMITE FOLK LORE OR SOMETHING THAT HE WAS JUST RETELLING HERE.



NO... THAT'S NOT IT... THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL.

IT'S HIM, ART... HE'S WRITING ABOUT HIMSELF. HE'S WRITING ABOUT HUNTING DOWN ENEMIES OF THE VILTRUMITE EMPIRE.

HE MUST HAVE HIDDEN SOMETHING IN THESE BOOKS... SOMETHING THAT I CAN USE TO HELP HIM.

BUT WHAT COULD IT BE? WHAT COULD HE HAVE HIDDEN HERE?





and at once, I knew I had made a grave mistake. In an instant I was surrounded, swarmed, overwhelmed. It was unclear if I would make it out alive. I had grossly underestimated the situation.

The mission was clear, investigate the inhabitants of this harsh planet, determine their exact threat level to the empire, and then report back for further instructions. It appeared then that I might not make it back to receive those instructions. It was clear the threat level was high. With almost minimal effort I was quickly injured. These creatures were fast. They seemed to come out of nowhere. I did not have time to react. My life was immediately in danger.

The size of these beasts was deceiving. They were barely twice my size. I've battled creatures ten times their size with infinitely less effort. The planet they inhabit caused them to evolve into such tough creatures. The gravitational quotient on this unnamed planet was so severe they had to be stronger than most to simply be able to move. They were remarkable creatures. In hindsight I can look at them scientifically and I find a tremendous respect for them.

At the time I felt differently. I just wanted to survive, if that meant wiping out the entire race, I would have done it, as harsh as that sounds.

With every attempt to reach the sky and escape to the stars, I was thwarted, pulled back into the heap, ravaged all over again. While these creatures did not possess the ability to fly they could jump long distances and high into the air with their powerful legs. Any attempt to fly was met with a swift attack from one or more that resulted in my falling back to the planet's surface. It was clear that strategy was not going to work.

I began trying to fight my way through the horde. If I could push through them, maybe I could get far enough away from them fast enough to make my escape. The problem with that strategy was that I was under constant attack. I could feel the flesh being ripped from my bones as I pressed on. This method of escape was not going





THE PACT

As an added bonus for you Invincible TPB purchasers I'm running THE PACT #4 on the following pages. This is just the main story, not the full book. There are a ton of cool back-up stories also done for this issue, so feel free to hunt it down if you want it all. It's well worth the price of admission.

The Pact came about because of Jim Valentino. He had the idea of getting Image's "young heroes" together to form a loosely organized team. Firebreather, Zephyr from Noble Causes and his new teenaged ShadowHawk rounded out the team. His idea (which was really cool) was that each creator (or co-creator) would write one issue of the four issue mini-series. Valentino himself wrote (and drew) issue one. Jay Faerber wrote issue 2, Phil Hester wrote issue 3 and I wrote issue 4 (which is what's being collected here). Don't worry, they were all stand-alone stories, so you won't be lost.

On the art, I got Jason Howard to lend his talents. I had found Jason online--I stumbled across his website after he sent me a pin-up for Invincible. I immediately fell in love with his art. When it was clear that both Ryan and Cory wouldn't be able to do this Pact book, he was my immediate choice. He did an amazing job on this issue... and because I had SO much fun working with him, we're actually putting together another project together, to be released at some point in "the future."

For the story, I had wanted to bring back Doc Seismic, from Invincible issue 10, for some time. I really liked him and always planned to follow up on his story after he fell deep into the Earth in that issue. I figured, what the heck, why not do it here? The only problem is that I now had a bit of Invincible continuity floating out there in another series--which I'd always tried to avoid (for the most part). Doc Seismic returns in issue 36 (the next issue after this trade, to be collected in volume 8) and he's all of a sudden in PRISON. So people who didn't read the this Pact issue will probably be a bit lost. But TPB readers... well, you'll be in the loop, you lucky devils.

But enough talk--get to reading, kiddo!

-Robert Kirkman

CHECK IT OUT! INVINCIBLE, SHADOWHAWK,
FIREBREATHER, AND ZEPHYR TOGETHER IN

THE PACT™

HURRY UP
WITH YOUR
GRAVES,
FIREBREATHER
AND ZEPHYR!
I'D FINISH YOU
MYSELF, BUT...
HA, HA... I HAVE
A CODE
AGAINST
KILLING...

...SO
I'LL
DO
THE
JOB,
BOYS!

"DIG NOW,
DIE LATER!"



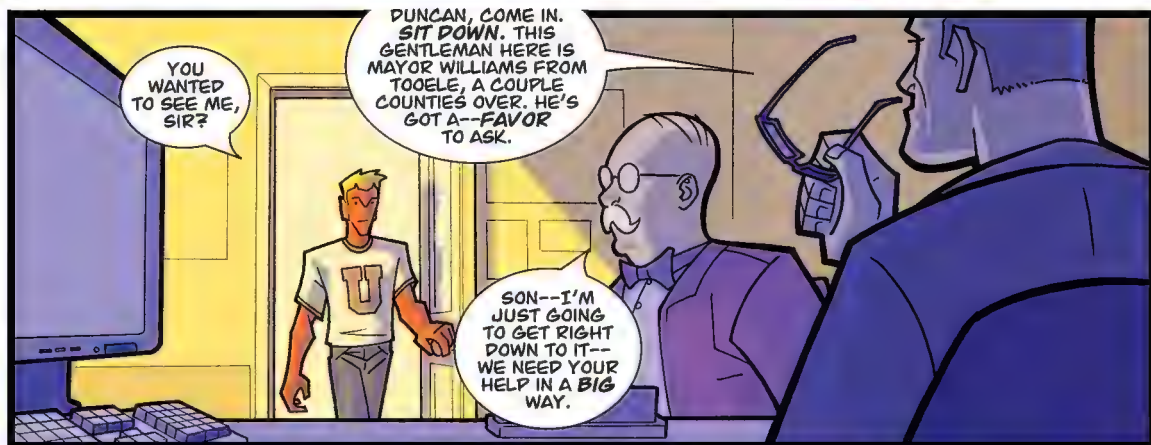
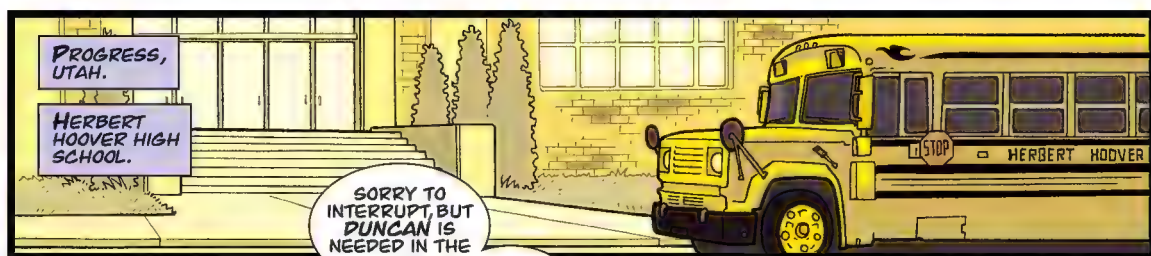
THE PACT™

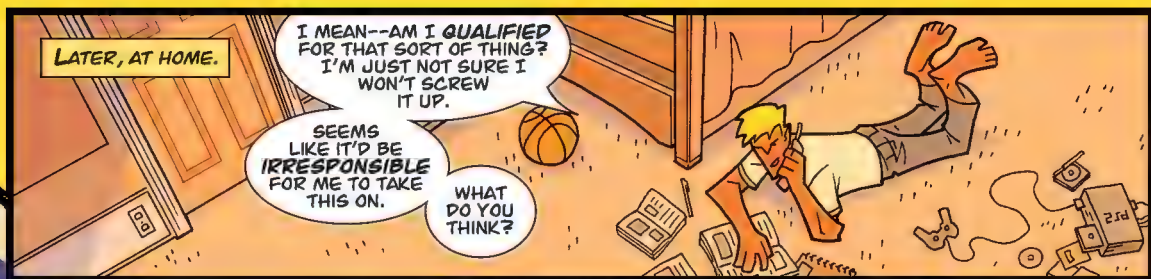
ROBERT KIRKMAN
Writer

JASON HOWARD
Penciler, Inker, Colorist

RUS WOOTON
Letterer

THE PACT & SHADOWHAWK - created by Jim Valentino
FIREBREATHER - created by Phil Hester & Andy Kuhn
ZEPHYR & NOBLE CAUSES - created by Jay Faerber
INVINCIBLE - created by Robert Kirkman & Cory Walker





LATER, AT HOME.

I MEAN--AM I QUALIFIED FOR THAT SORT OF THING? I'M JUST NOT SURE I WON'T SCREW IT UP.

SEEMS LIKE IT'D BE IRRESPONSIBLE FOR ME TO TAKE THIS ON.

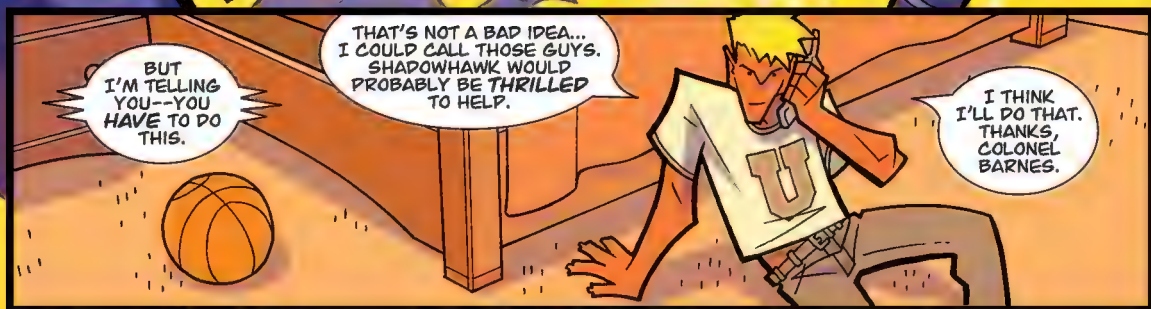
WHAT DO YOU THINK?



DUNCAN--YOU GOT TO DO THIS--SIMPLE AS THAT. I KNOW YOU DON'T WANT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO YOURSELF, I UNDERSTAND THAT--BUT YOU WANT TO GET THESE HIGH SCHOOL KIDS OFF YOUR BACK AND BECOMING A LOCAL HERO WILL DO THAT.

IF YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT SCREWING THINGS UP, CALL YOUR LITTLE SUPERHERO FRIENDS. Y'KNOW, THE CHROME GUY FROM NEW YORK, INVINCIBLE, AND THAT SLUT FROM THE NOBLES.

YOU'RE PALS WITH THEM NOW, RIGHT? CALL THEM. THEY CAN TAKE SOME OF THE BLAME IF YOU SCREW UP AT THE VERY LEAST...



BUT I'M TELLING YOU--YOU HAVE TO DO THIS.

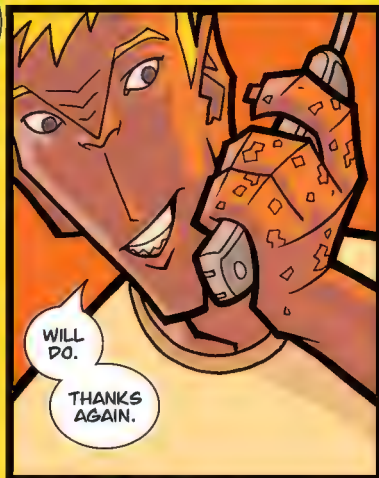
THAT'S NOT A BAD IDEA... I COULD CALL THOSE GUYS. SHADOWHAWK WOULD PROBABLY BE THRILLED TO HELP.

I THINK I'LL DO THAT. THANKS, COLONEL BARNES.



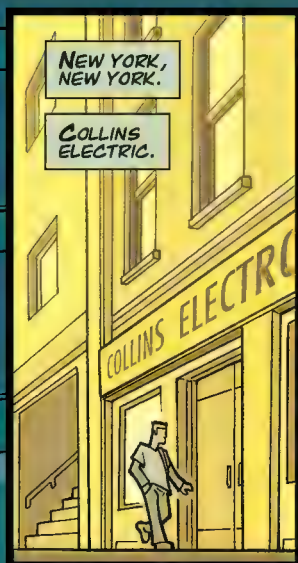
GLAD I COULD HELP, KID. I'M GOING TO LET YOU GO NOW--I NEED TO SHOOT MY GUN AND THERE'S NO WAY I CAN TALK OVER THAT.

IF YOU NEED ME, CALL.



WILL DO.

THANKS AGAIN.





AFTER A SHORT
FLIGHT ACROSS
THE COUNTRY.

THEY SHOULD BE
AROUND HERE
SOMEWHERE. AT
LEAST--THAT'S
WHAT DUNCAN
SAID...

THERE--
IS THAT
THEM?

LOOK WHO
DECIDED
TO SHOW
UP.

NO FAIR--
I HAD TO FIND
OUT WHERE
SHADOWHAWK
LIVED SINCE
HE WASN'T
ANSWERING HIS
PHONE.

WHERE
IS EVERYONE
ANYWAY? I
THOUGHT WE WERE
SAVING SOME TOWN
OR SOMETHING.
SHOULDN'T A MAYOR
BE HERE TO TELL
US WHAT TO
DO?

IT'S
GOOD TO
SEE YOU,
ZEPHYR.

HE SORT OF POINTED
US IN THIS DIRECTION
AND SAID THEY WERE
COMING OUT OF THIS
HOLE. THEN THEY
RAN FOR THE
HILLS.

THIS IS KIND
OF MY FIRST TRY
AT SUPERHERO
WORK. ANY
IDEAS?

DON'T
LOOK AT
ME. I'M A
FOLLOWER,
NOT A
LEADER.

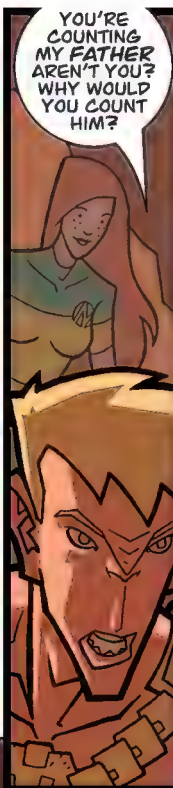
C'MON--I'LL LEAD
THE WAY. STAY
BEHIND ME. ANYTHING
THAT HITS US BY
SURPRISE SHOULD
BOUNCE OFF.

EVEN IF IT
KNOCKS ME
OUT IN THE
PROCESS.

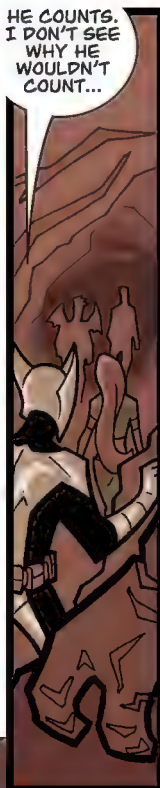


IT CAN'T BE TOO BAD...

...THE TOWN'S STILL STANDING, SO WE'VE FACED TOUGHER.



YOU'RE COUNTING MY FATHER AREN'T YOU? WHY WOULD YOU COUNT HIM?



HE COUNTS. I DON'T SEE WHY HE WOULDN'T COUNT...



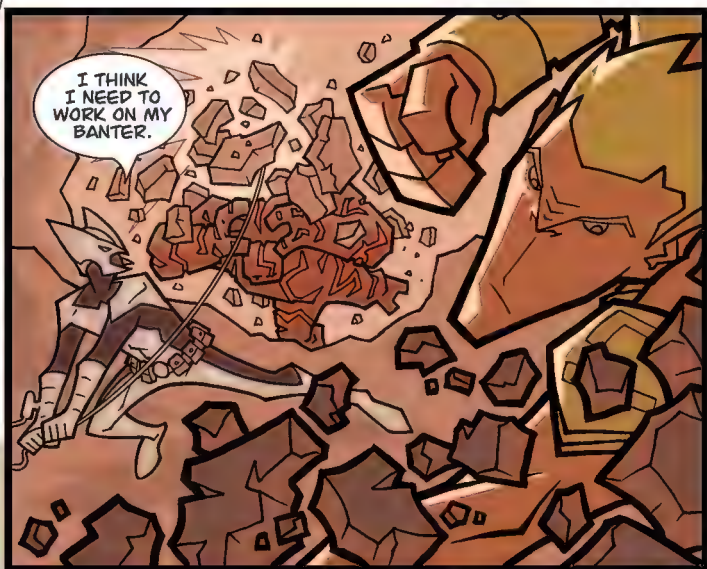
IT'S GETTING KINDA DARK IN HERE. DUNCAN-- YOU THINK YOU COULD--?



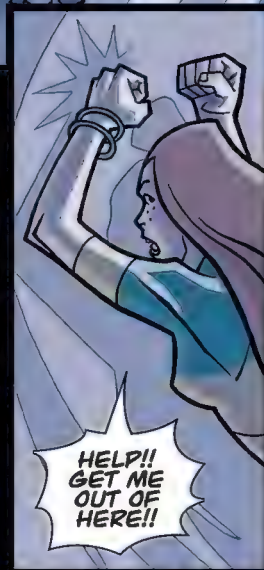
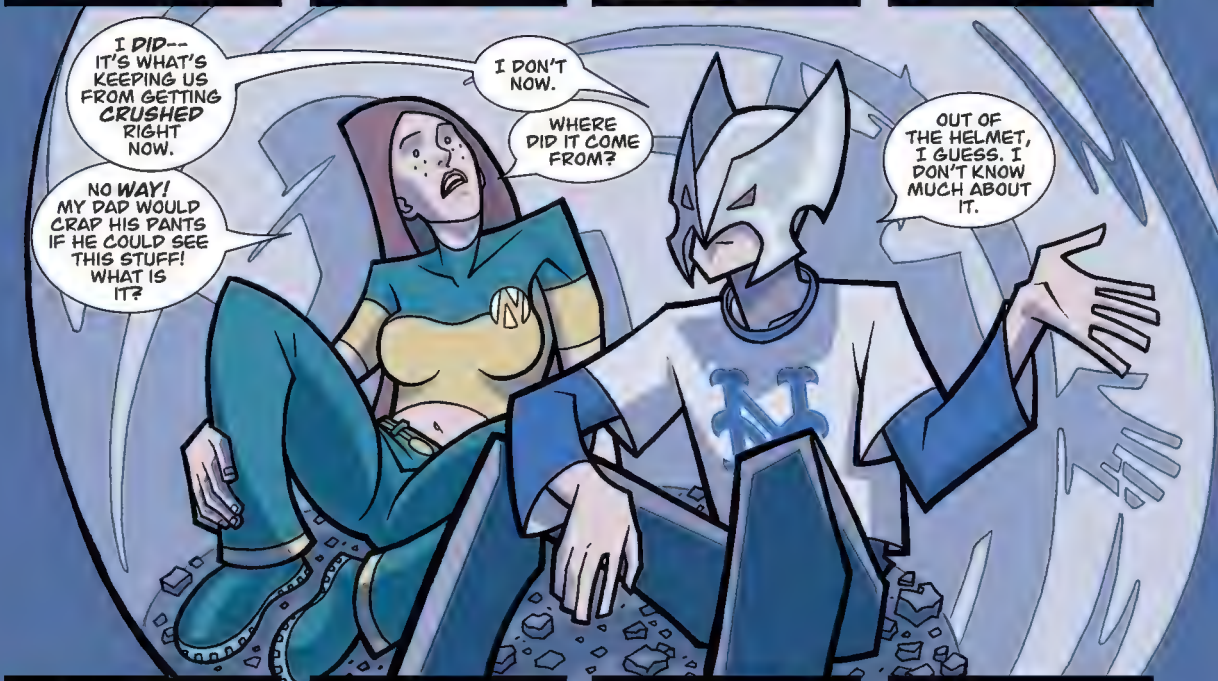
CHECK IT OUT-- LAVA PEOPLE.

THAT DIDN'T TAKE LONG!











GET ME AWAY FROM THIS GUY!

I'M TRYING NOT TO TAKE OFFENSE TO THIS.



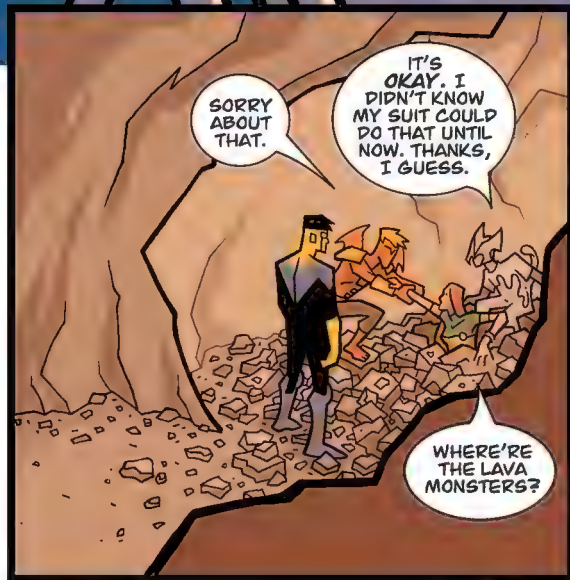
SOMEONE'S KNOCKING FROM THE OTHER SIDE.

OH, GOOD--- WE'RE NOT GOING TO SUFFOCATE, NOW.



ARE YOU GUYS OKAY?

WE ARE NOW.



SORRY ABOUT THAT.

IT'S OKAY. I DIDN'T KNOW MY SUIT COULD DO THAT UNTIL NOW. THANKS, I GUESS.

WHERE'RE THE LAVA MONSTERS?



WE DON'T KNOW. THEY KINDA RETREATED AFTER DUNCAN WENT BERSERK. MAYBE WE SCARED THEM AWAY.

MAYBE THEY WON'T GO TO THE SURFACE AGAIN-- MAYBE WE'RE DONE.



DON'T COUNT ON IT!!

I SEE
YOU'VE MET
MY BELOVED
MAGMANITES!
SUCH GENTLE
CREATURES--
UNLESS YOU
CROSS
THEM!

DID YOU
EVER THINK
YOU'D SEE ME
AGAIN, INVINCIBLE?!
DID YOU THINK I WOULD
SURVIVE AFTER YOU
LET ME FALL TO
MY DEATH?!*

WELL--I
SURVIVED--
EVEN THRIVED
DOWN HERE.
SURPRISED?

ARE YOU
SURPRISED BY
THE RETURN OF
DOC
SEISMIC?!

*SEE INVINCIBLE
ISSUE #10.



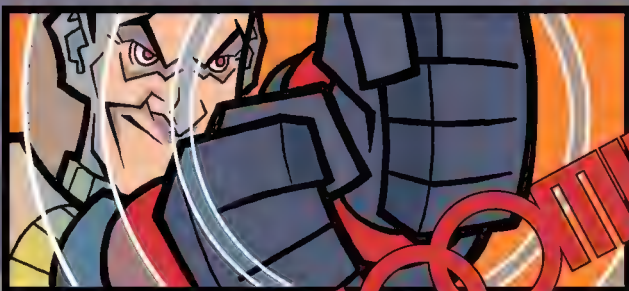
CRAP.

SORRY,
GUYS. THIS IS
ONE OF MINE.



YOURS?!
I'M ONE OF
YOURS?!

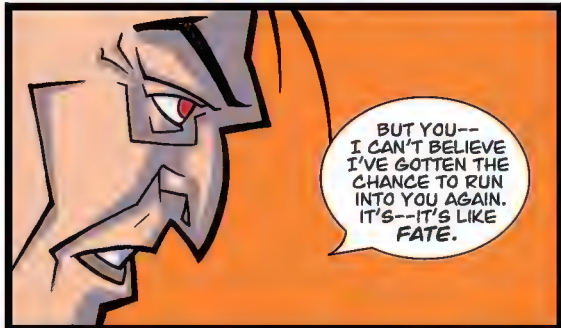
HOW DARE
YOU CLAIM ME
LIKE SOME
LOWLY
VILLAIN!



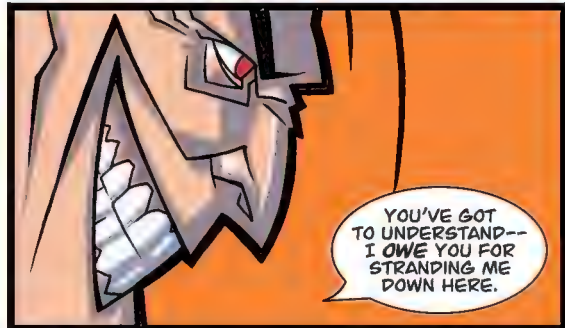
I'M SORRY--
I CAN OVERREACT
AT TIMES. IT'S TRUE.
IT'S JUST THAT--I
USED TO BE A
HEAVYWEIGHT BEFORE
FATHER TIME TOOK
HIS TOLL ON
ME.

THE
IMMORTAL,
CAPTAIN COSMIC,
EVEN THE METEOR
TWIN. I WAS BIG
TIME. I STILL DON'T
EVEN KNOW WHO
YOU ARE. I'M
JUST--

OVERLY
SENSITIVE.



BUT YOU--
I CAN'T BELIEVE
I'VE GOTTEN THE
CHANCE TO RUN
INTO YOU AGAIN.
IT'S--IT'S LIKE
FATE.



YOU'VE GOT
TO UNDERSTAND--
I OWE YOU FOR
STRANDING ME
DOWN HERE.



I CAN UNDERSTAND YOU BEING ANGRY BUT IF YOU'LL THINK BACK ON THE EVENTS THAT LED TO YOU LIVING DOWN HERE YOU'LL RECALL I WAS TRYING TO SAVE YOU AT ONE POINT AND YOU SORT OF...



UH.



I OWE YOU A DEBT OF GRATITUDE.



REALLY?



YOUR VILLAINS ALWAYS LIKE THIS?



NO, NEVER. NOT EVEN ONCE.

I PROMISE.



YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT MY LIFE WAS LIKE BEFORE I ENCOUNTERED YOU AT MOUNT RUSHMORE THAT DAY.



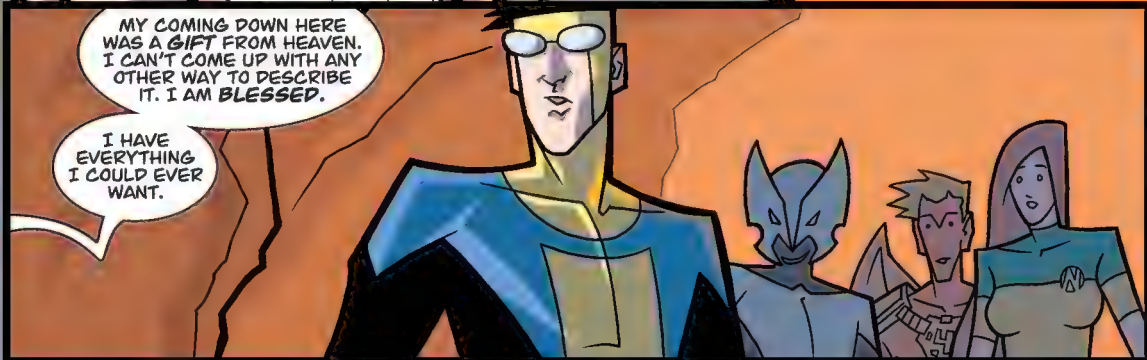
I WAS OVER THE HILL, PAST MY PRIME-- ALL THAT. MY GLORY DAYS WERE GONE. I KNEW IT. I WAS VERY BITTER ABOUT IT. I DIDN'T WANT TO ACCEPT IT.

THE FACT IS--I WOULD NEVER RULE A SMALL COUNTRY, HAVE A HORDE OF MINIONS, BE RESPECTED IN MY TWILIGHT YEARS THE WAY I THOUGHT I DESERVED TO BE.

OR RATHER-- I WOULDN'T HAVE--IF YOU HADN'T COME ALONG.

MY COMING DOWN HERE WAS A GIFT FROM HEAVEN. I CAN'T COME UP WITH ANY OTHER WAY TO DESCRIBE IT. I AM BLESSED.

I HAVE EVERYTHING I COULD EVER WANT.



NOW I HAVE MY UNDERGROUND KINGDOM. I TRULY AM ROYALTY DOWN HERE. AND I HAVE MY LOYAL SUBJECTS...

...MY MAGMANITES.

AND IF I EVER NEED ANYTHING--I SIMPLY SEND THEM UP TO THE SURFACE TO TAKE IT. FOOD, MONEY, JEWELRY, WHATEVER.

I AM TRULY HAPPY HERE. I JUST WANT TO THANK YOU FOR THAT.



WOW.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. REALLY. JUST WOW.

I THINK THE ONLY WAY TO RESPOND TO THAT IS WITH A GOOD OLD-FASHIONED...





...INVINCIBLE
PUNCH!



OKAY,
HE'S OUT--I
GUESS WE FIGHT
THE ROCK GUYS
AGAIN. GET READY--
LET'S DO IT RIGHT
THIS TIME. WE HIT
THEM AS A TEAM
AND--



ACTUALLY...

YEAH.
LOOKS LIKE
THE ROCK
GUYS ARE
BEATING
FEET.



WOW, AND ALL
IT TOOK WAS ONE
PUNCH. I GUESS
THEY FIGURE IF
YOU'LL DECK AN
OLD MAN LIKE THAT
YOU'RE CAPABLE
OF ANYTHING.

MAYBE
THEY'RE
SMARTER
THAN WE
THOUGHT.

HEY, YOU GUYS DIDN'T FIGHT THIS GUY BEFORE. HE'S CRAZY, TRUST ME. HE WOULD HAVE BROUGHT THIS WHOLE CAVE DOWN ON US ONCE HE REALIZED I WASN'T GOING TO PAT HIM ON THE HEAD AND ALLOW HIM TO KEEP TERRORIZING THAT TOWN UP ABOVE.

THIS COULD HAVE GONE BADLY IF I HADN'T SUCKER PUNCHED HIM. WE COULD HAVE ALL BEEN HURT.

IF YOU SAY SO "INVINCIBLE."

WHATEVER. LET'S GET HIM UP TO THE SURFACE BEFORE HE WAKES UP. I'VE GOT TO GET HOME.

HEH. "INVINCIBLE PUNCH"?

YOU DON'T LIKE IT? I THOUGHT IT WAS APPROPRIATE.

≥SIGH≤

I THINK I'M GOING TO HAVE TO RETIRE THAT, AFTER ALL. I THINK I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO THINKS IT'S COOL.

YOU THINK IT'S COOL?

SHUT UP.

I DON'T MEAN TO BE FORWARD OR ANYTHING, BUT... DO YOU MIND IF I CALL YOU? I MEAN, EVEN IF THERE ISN'T ANYTHING WE NEED TO GO FIGHT.

UH... SURE.

THAT'D BE OKAY... I GUESS.

LATER THAT NIGHT.

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, YOUNG LADY?

I'VE BEEN OUT DOING SUPERHERO STUFF. IT HAD TO BE ON THE NEWS-- I THOUGHT YOU'D BE PROUD OF ME.

MAYBE IF THE PHONE HADN'T BEEN RINGING OFF THE HOOK FOR THE LAST HOUR.

OH, NO-- YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME. HE COULDN'T BE--NOT ALREADY--?

THAT BOY SHADOWHAWK THAT YOU'VE BEEN HANGING OUT WITH. YOU TWO AREN'T--

GOD, NO--ARE YOU KIDDING ME? HE'S A WEIRDO-- LIKE--NOT EVEN IN A GOOD WAY.

GOOD. THAT PUTS MY MIND AT EASE.

WAIT--YOU DON'T LIKE HIM?

HEAVENS, NO. ALL THAT BLACK--THE CREEPY HELMET--THOSE RED EYES. THE BOY'S PROBABLY A SERIAL KILLER.

IT WOULD DESTROY ME IF YOU WERE TO GO OUT WITH HIM!

HEY, UH, SHADOWHAWK? YEAH, EDDIE, RIGHT? HEY.

IT'S ZEPHYR. YOU GOT TIME TO TALK?

Coming in the next issue of-

THE PACT

NOT A DREAM--
NOT A HOAX--
THE
DEATH
OF INVINCIBLE!

WHAT'S
WITH THE
WATERWORKS,
POPS? DIDN'T YOU
NEARLY BEAT HIM TO
DEATH ONCE,
YOURSELF?

IT'S
COMPLICATED.



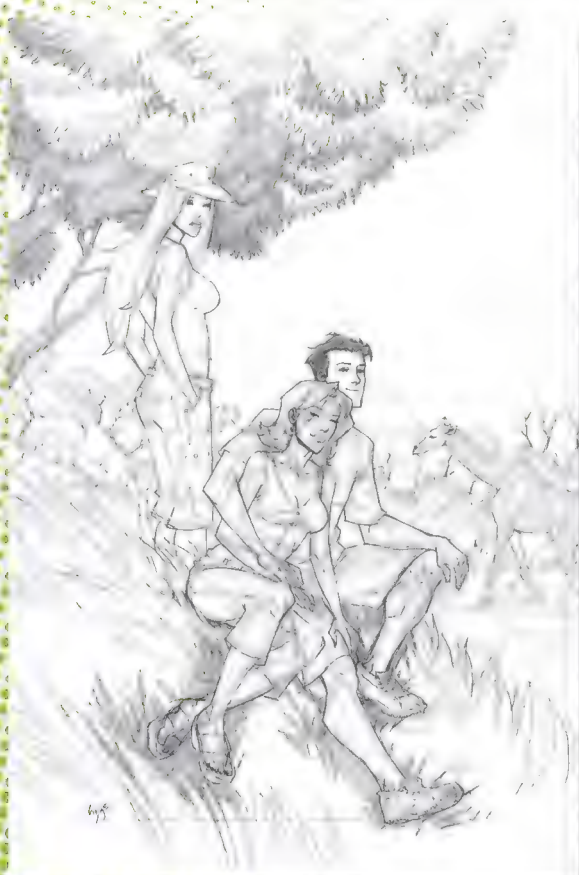
This is an ad for a fake next issue of The Pact that ran as the back cover for issue 4. Jason Howard came up with the stuff on the tombstone. He's a witty fellow, that one.



Welcome aboard the SS sketchbook section of this here Volume 7 TPB. Let's just dive right into things. I think I spoke in the last TPB about how restrictive the cover theme for these books has become (floating Mark figure over some panels). This issue Ryan came up with the idea of tying the Invincible figure in with the bottom panel of the future Guardians of the Globe. Ryan initially planned to have him standing on some stupid future thing (stupid Ryan). But I told him to just have Invincible floating there. Somewhere along the line, between this sketch and the final version Ryan decided to make the panels vertical to show more of Amber and Atom Eve. I think it vastly improved the look of the cover.



Here we have another one of those random figures of Invincible for the TPB covers. And the pencils to the final cover of this volume. This is actually one of my favorite covers ever. I was going to buy the original art, but Ryan went and sold it to someone else instead. I like to joke around like I hate Ryan in these little text parts of the sketchbook... but well... it's starting to not be a joke (I'm joking here).



This was a swell cover. We didn't really know what to do for this cover. I just told Ryan "Mark and Amber go to Africa to visit Atom Eve." And I might have said something about making Eve look jealously at the happy couple. And Ryan just ran with it. I really like that when you get to issue 31, you can get away with a cover that has everyone in plain clothes--no costumes. I think for issue 40 the cover is going to be William reading a magazine in his underwear or something.

Here's the layout and pencils for the cover to issue 32. I had NO CLUE what to do for this cover. Ryan asked and I said "I don't know--they're still visiting Eve." Ryan's wife Erin, I believe, made the suggestion of reversing the cover to 31. Have this cover be Mark and Atom Eve in costume having a grand old time, with poor little Amber looking jealous. Ryan ran with it from there and did a GREAT job. Thanks, Erin!



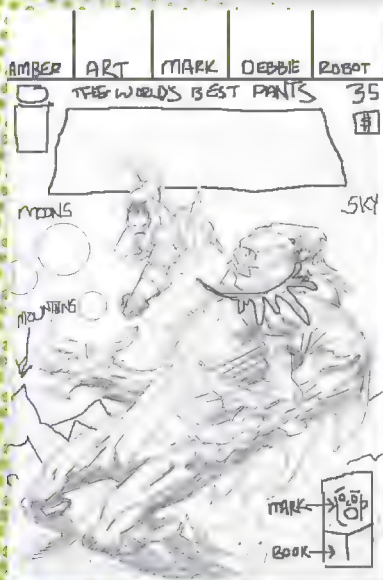


Layout and pencils of the cover to issue 33. I actually took a bunch of photos of myself, gritting my teeth looking all evil and stuff for this cover. I wanted Ryan to have some reference for the face I wanted Angstrom making and I couldn't really describe it. My phone (which I used to take the photos) was on the fritz around the time this cover needed to be drawn and Ryan drew it without them. Now I have like 30 goofy photos of myself buried somewhere on my phone. If someone found my phone they'd think I was insane.



Cover layout and pencils
for issue 34. Also on
this page... the fake UPC
boxes from the covers of
33 and 34. I always loved
how comics from the
late '80s and early '90s
put those little drawings
in the UPC boxes for the
direct market comics...
and I've always wanted
to have a comic that
looked like that. And so...
I had Ryan work it up. I
thought it looked cool.





Here we have the layouts for the cover to 35. Ryan did some drawings of Nolan fighting this huge monster and I took them into Photoshop and worked out a layout for the cover. I wanted to make it look like an old issue of Amazing Spider-Man. I got a kick out of it. On the following page you'll see the final pencils for this cover.





Here we have the layout and pencils for a two-page spread from issue 31. I've wanted to bring Mastermind into this book since I first introduced him in the first BRIT one-shot. He's a favorite character of mine.





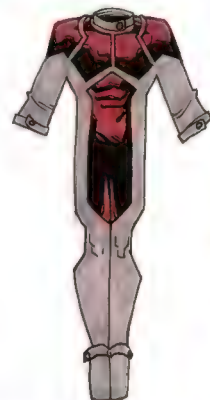
Here's Ryan's layouts for some pages in issue 33. Some looser than others. Also on this page, the first drawing of Angstrom Levy--in his clothes/costume. This drawing was actually done for WizKids when they were doing the Invincible HeroClix set. Angstrom hadn't yet appeared in the book like this and I wanted to make sure the HeroClix figure was based on his final look.



This is page 12
of issue 34 from
layout to pencils.
Good page.



Here's a cool sketch of Atom Eve and Ryan's design for a new Black Samson costume. I really dug it and approved it. While Ryan was working on the pages to issue 31 Jim Valentino announced his EMISSARY comic book at Image. The design and color scheme for that character looked VERY similar so we changed the color from red to purple.





Ah, the PAGE FROM HELL. Seriously, this thing was a pain in the butt. Here's the original script for this page:

PAGE 17: ONE PANEL

Panel one:

Large panel: Like page 19, huge panel, space left on the right side of the page, make it the exact same size as the space on page 19. We're in space, planets in the background, all that. The space guy Cory designed is coming at us all action-like on his space-bike shooting his laser gun at us. The gun blast is special. It goes through ANYTHING and never stops. It's said that his gun blasts are still traveling through space, every one of them, still blasting through anything in their path. These blasts are strong enough to kill a viiltrumite. So the gun blast should look cool, like an energy beam with a swirling wave around it--very sci-fi. Show me pencils of this page before you ink it.

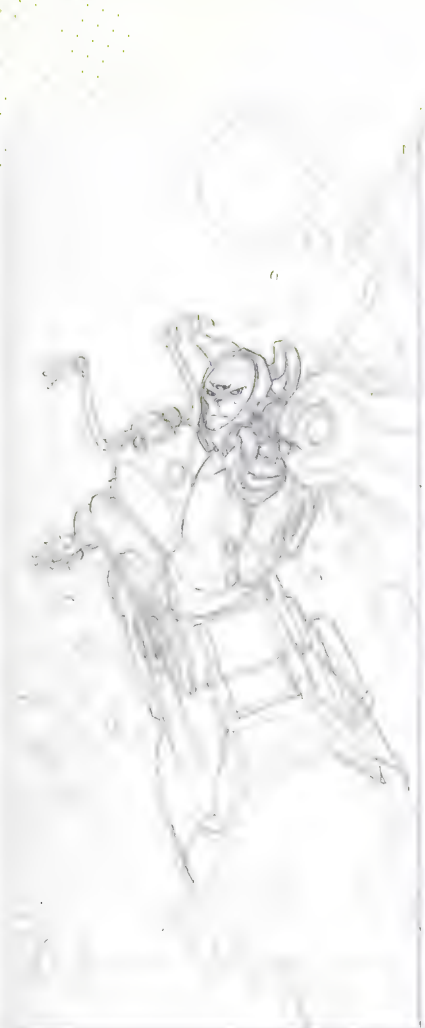
And Ryan DID show me the pencils. And I was getting ready for this year's Comic-Con and we were trying to get the book back on schedule so while I didn't like the pencils all that much, the pose was a little off, I told Ryan to ink it and be done with it. But the story didn't end there folks!

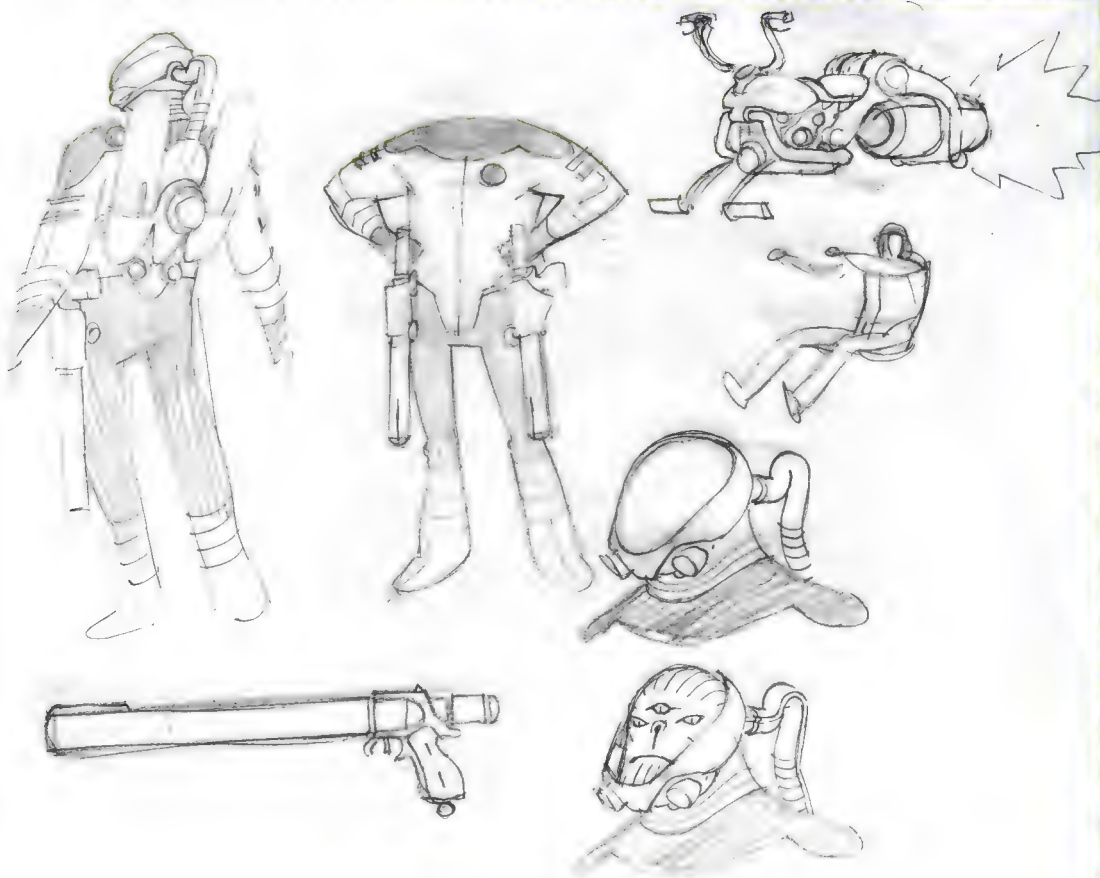


After I got back from Comic-Con, I was going in and getting issue 35 ready for the letterer, Rus Wooton, and I realized... I just didn't like this page. It would have been fine if this guy was just a throw away character but this guy is going to be pretty important to the book and I wanted people to like him right off the bat, so I told Ryan to give it another go. Have the guy coming at us--looking cool--firing his gun AT US. I took the time to do a layout. And I changed Cory's design of the character a bit too. I made him have hands for feet, and kinda sketched out a way to make his proportions less "human." I sent that to Ryan and he did the version with the leg and blast breaking into the text part. The problem here was that the text part couldn't be broken into because I wanted that to look like a novel. So Ryan did a second version that followed my layout exactly. The only problem with that was that my layout SUCKED. So back to the drawing board.



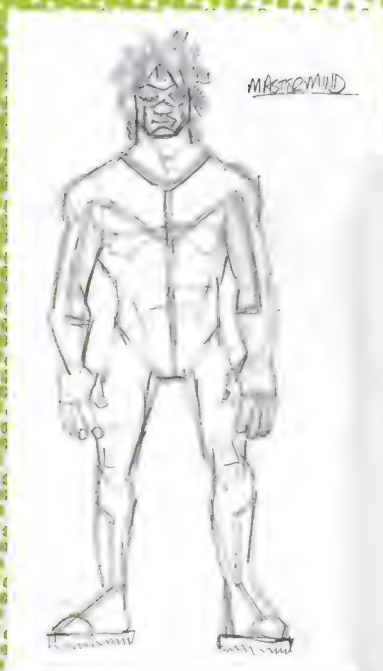
Enter Cory Walker. I asked him to come up with a cool pose of the Space Rider coming at us, shooting his laser and he did this sketch. Not coming at you--but cool nonetheless, and it made the character LOOK cool. So we had a winner. Ryan used Cory's layout and we were off to the races. Thanks, Cory! I should say, though, I'm sure Ryan could have pulled this off on his own had he not been stuck in post-Comic-Con jet lag.





And here we have Cory's designs for The Space Rider. Ryan is sometimes buried in the middle of an issue so I like to enlist Cory's help on designs from time to time to help Ryan out. I dig the look of this guy. We'll be seeing much more of him in future issues.





Mastermind was a character that first appeared in BRIT. When he appeared there he was wearing plain clothes and I wanted him to appear more superheroish in INVINCIBLE. So here is an attempt to give him a costume. Looking at it here--I don't know why I even bothered to do a sketch. When I sent this to Ryan, I told him to give him an I-Pod and one of those "puffy coats" (I don't know what they're really called). So Ryan did the sketch where Mastermind is wearing the vest. I told him to give him a full jacket and draw his hair a little differently and then Ryan turned in the final version. It's funny to note that when Mastermind appeared in BRIT he was listening to a CD player... that seems SO dated now even though it was just three years ago.



SHAPESMITH



Shapemith

Shapemith is my favorite new character in Invincible. On this page you'll see Ryan's original design and my Photoshop tweaks. I don't know WHAT he was thinking with that cape!



Ryan's design for future Monster Girl. I suggested getting rid of the shorts since even though the monster is MALE Monster Girl is after all, a girl... so he gave her a more gymnast look... which I thought was funny. Also on this page, the original design for Rampage and my Photoshop tweaks. I didn't want Rampage to have a face. I think it's cool with villains don't have faces--makes them look more alien or whatever. Also on this page... a Mauler sketch.

RAMPAGE



RAMPAGE





Here are some con sketches Ryan has done recently. If you're at a comic book convention... there's not a better use for you cash than a Ryan Ottley sketch. They're totally great!





Here's some craziness from Ryan's sketchbook and a really cool drawing of Mark's favorite comic book character, Science Dog. The other sketch on this page was for Mike Stornio who I believe has the only INVINCIBLE theme sketchbook that he's been getting filled up a cons for a while now. I can't wait to see that thing when it's done.





That's all for now, kids. I'll leave you with a totally AWESOME marker sketch of Invincible by Ryan. Enjoy!

-Robert Kirkman



SUPERHERO

**On a trip to Africa,
Mark finds himself torn
between two lives:
his normal life with his
girlfriend Amber and
his superhero life with
good friend Atom Eve.**

Decisions, decisions...

This volume collects
issues 31-35 of the
Eisner Nominated series.

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